

THE HYMN BOOK OF THE CHURCH

FRANCES ARNOLD FORSTER

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THE HYMN-BOOK OF THE CHURCH

OR

THE GROWTH OF THE PSALTER

BY

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“The sum of our words is, HE IS ALL.”

“How shall we have strength to glorify him ?
When ye glorify him, exalt him as much as ye can ;
For even yet will he exceed ;
And when ye exalt him, put forth your full strength :
Be not weary, for ye will never attain.”

SIRAEH xlviii.

PREFACE

THIS book, it should be clearly understood, is not to be looked upon as a commentary on the Psalms. Its claim is a far humbler one—namely, that it is an attempt to place the average reader of the Psalms in a better position for the profitable study and understanding of existing commentaries, written by scholars and past-masters of the subject.

The need for some such preparatory book was brought home to the writer some years ago through the experiences gained in a Study Circle on the Book of Psalms. The members of it were educated women, all of them thoroughly familiar with the Prayer-Book Text of the Psalter, but the majority of them had no knowledge at all of the history of the Book, or of the results of present-day scholarship.

The experiment was suggested of tracing out the analogy between the work of compiling an English Hymnal, intended for both public and private use, and the gradual growth of the Jewish Hymn-Book, the one true standard "*Hymn-Book of the Church.*" This method threw light on the *literary history* of the Psalms. It helped to explain alterations and additions in the text, and raised various points of discussion concerning authorship.

In the freedom of informal talk it was easy to pass from

questions of History and Literature, and to bring out into daylight other questions, of another order—half-recognized stumbling-blocks that were silently troubling the mind of one and another. Such stumbling-blocks proved to be of very different kinds. Chief among them was a resentment against the spirit of vindictiveness on the one hand, and of self-satisfaction on the other, found in certain Psalms, and tacitly felt to be inconsistent with the character of writings divinely inspired. A wholly different kind of perplexity lay in the question, How far is “the Christ” plainly “fore-told” in the Psalms?

It is needless to say that no difficulty was brought forward which has not been handled over and over again by reverent-minded and scholarly writers and preachers who have brought to the task the best powers of their minds and the fullness of their first-hand knowledge. Yet it may perhaps be justly pleaded that their work needs translation into a simpler language if it is to meet the needs of wholly untrained lovers of the Psalter; and such “untrained” lovers are nowhere more largely to be found than among our most constant church-goers, who are accustomed to join in the monthly recitation of the entire Psalter, year in, year out, till the familiar words have become wellnigh a part of themselves—and yet the familiar puzzles still remain unexplained, and still, therefore, continue to strike their jarring note.

It will perhaps be objected that in the following pages there is a certain amount of repetition, but this, it may be owned, is not wholly accidental. The writer has had in

mind throughout, the memory of actual difficulties and perplexities—imperfectly expressed, and still more imperfectly met—in that Study Circle of long ago, and has therefore sought in this book to foreshadow in the Preface and to sum up in the Conclusion certain of these constantly recurring difficulties, and to emphasize certain lines of interpretation and application (worked out more at length in the intervening chapters), in the earnest hope that some readers may be helped to feel afresh the inspired power of the 'Psalms to fit "the new needs" of each generation.

On many of the minor points touched upon in this book there are very considerable differences of opinion among experts, and the writer is painfully conscious that since the book has no claim to be original, but is only the outcome of gleanings from the labours of first-hand authorities, it may at times be found guilty of being inconsistent with itself. Yet it is hoped that even this fault may not wholly invalidate its usefulness as a stepping-stone to better help, for the very aim and object of the whole undertaking has been to show that the value of the Book of Psalms, for us Christians in this twentieth century, does not depend on any one theory of authorship or transmission, or even of inspiration.

It is practically certain that among the changes directly or indirectly due to the War we shall find changes in our authorized public use of the Psalter—changes that will bring both loss and gain. In our Sunday services we shall be at liberty to use specially appointed Psalms, as we now

have specially appointed Lessons. On week-days we shall no longer in our monthly course recite the entire Psalter, for a very small number of Psalms—among them the 58th, with its cruel and vengeful words—will no longer be made use of in public worship, and it is probable that we shall no longer be tried by having to join in the un-Christlike prayers that mar the tender beauty of the 109th Psalm. All this will be for our gain, and yet there must needs be a certain loss, in the inevitable lessening of our familiarity with the Psalter as a whole.

But though they may no longer be forced upon our attention, the old difficulties still remain in the Psalms, and questions of many sorts must of necessity arise in our minds as day after day we make use of this most time-honoured of all Hymn-Books, and it behoves each one of us to try—by thought and pains and by the best helps within reach—to find our own answer. Of the Psalms, no less than of the prophetical writings, our Lord declared that they witnessed concerning himself (*cp.* Luke 24, 27 with 24, 44); and therefore it is the bounden duty of each one of us, who so continually make use of these Psalms, to seek to understand in what sense the Psalmists too—like Moses and Isaiah—can be said to “speak” of our blessed Lord and Master (*cp.* John 12, 41).

Only, all this we can never even hope to apprehend unless we set ourselves to use patiently both the human and the Divine helps that are within our reach. We must not rest content with mere verbal familiarity, blessed gift though it be. We must *study* the Psalms, but not the Psalms alone.

We must work in other parts of what S. Leo the Great calls "the broad fields of Holy Scripture," seeking out for ourselves the way in which the broken lights vouchsafed to Psalmist and Prophet shine out in their fullness to those who, like S. Peter and the Evangelists, had already recognized and confessed the Divine glory of Jesus of Nazareth.

In thus studying the Psalms we need not be afraid to open our minds to fresh teaching as to their history and purpose and authorship. And if needs be, we must have the courage and faith and humility to give up, at the call of Truth, traditional and dear beliefs.

But we must never rest content with our study of the Psalms until some breath of their innermost spirit has reached us, till we too have experienced something of that "thirst" for God, that "very fervent desire" for himself, and his will and his honour, that in one Psalm after another lifts the soul heavenward. It would be no very difficult task to trace out in the Psalter each one of our Saviour's beatitudes, with its promised reward, but foremost, surely, among the number would stand out the blessedness of those who "hunger and thirst" (*e.g.*, 42, 1; 63, 1; 119, 81, 131; 143, 6); who yearn to be led ever onwards (25, 4, 5), and to be taught the things that they know not—crying out, as in the ninefold petition of the 119th Psalm, "*Teach me.*" And here, too, we are shown the reward of such a thirst and such a desire: "He satisfieth the longing soul, and the hungry soul he filleth with good" (107, 9). But above all else we must ask our Master to "open" to us the depths of these ancient Hymns, and to be to us, as to his disciples

on the first Easter evening, his own Interpreter. Then, while we still search fearlessly into their human origin, we shall see the Psalms in their inspired and inexhaustible richness, and we shall learn to say of the Psalter in particular what Bishop Westcott once said to a friend of the Bible as a whole: "The more you study it freely and fearlessly, the more you will be convinced that it is a living thing."¹

So shall we come to use our God-given Hymn-Book in the spirit of that unknown writer of old,² who more than any other has taught us to see our Lord in the Book of Psalms, Like him, we shall look above and beyond the questions and the limitations that belong to the mere human authorship—whether of David or another—and, with him, we too may hope to attain to hearing and recognizing, through the words of men like ourselves, the deep inward teaching of the Holy Ghost.³

(a) BOOKS MADE USE OF.—The various books drawn upon in the writing of this volume have, it is hoped, been acknowledged in the footnotes; but the three *foundation books*, without whose help this one could never have been written at all, are Briggs's *Psalms*, in the International Critical Commentaries; Driver's *Literature of the Old Testament*;

¹ "Α ἱερός. You may not be able to distinguish clearly what is human and what is Divine, but you will be certain that both are there." Quoted by Canon Arthur Robinson in "Are we making Progress?"

² The author of the Hebrews. See the Epistle throughout.

³ Cp. Heb. 4, 7, with 3, 7.

Kirkpatrick's *Psalms*, in the Cambridge Bible for Schools. Dr. Hastings's *Dictionary of the Bible* has supplied information of all sorts and kinds, and has been freely drawn upon for many purposes, and very special help has been found in the articles by Dr. W. T. Davison on "The Psalms," and by Dr. Sanday on "The Son of God." Thanks are also due to Dr. Oesterley for permission to make free use of his *Psalms in the Jewish Church*.

(b) REFERENCES AND QUOTATIONS.—In nearly every case, unless otherwise stated, these are to the Revised Version of the Book of Psalms. It should be remembered that the numbering of the verses is not always quite the same as in the Prayer-Book. In all references the last verse named is included.

(c) USE OF CAPITAL LETTERS.—It is surely needless to say that it is through no lack of reverence that the pronouns of the sacred Names "He," "His," and the like, are not begun with a capital letter, as has been the custom in the last seventy or eighty years, but that the return to the earlier practice has been made purely from a desire to follow the usage of the Bible and Prayer-Book, and to bring the writer's part into harmony with the many biblical quotations.

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THE HYMN-BOOK OF THE CHURCH

CHAPTER I

THE PSALTER AND THE WAR

How often during the War did we hear or utter the phrase, "Nothing can ever be the same again!" In a thousand unexpected ways this thought was for ever being forced upon us. "The old things are passed away," we wistfully lamented; and yet sometimes even as we said the mournful words S. Paul's ending of the sentence, with its unfathomed depths of meaning and consolation, sprang to our minds: "The old things are passed away; *behold, they are become new.*"

And among "the old things" that have been given back to us transformed into something "new" we may assuredly reckon the Book of Psalms—that book which to countless men and women of our generation speaks as it never spoke before the War, waking fresh thoughts and associations that have their enduring value.

It has been one among our many inherited privileges that as English Church folk we entered the War with a great familiarity with the words of the Psalter. It was another of our privileges that we had grown up into this familiar knowledge in days of wellnigh undisturbed prosperity and peace. Yet both these privileges had their corresponding

drawbacks. Our very familiarity was a temptation to a thoughtless recitation of the words; while our ignorance of war-time conditions and feelings made not a few of the Psalms seem altogether remote from our experience, songs of a far-away age, reflecting merely the savagery and fierce passions of an unsettled order. Perhaps we admitted that they had an historical interest for those who cared to pursue it, but as a part of our devotions they seemed, to the impatience of not a few of us, out of place, unreal, unhelpful.

But in the years from 1914 to 1918 a strange thing happened. We found ourselves reciting the selfsame words, and finding therein no longer the mere bygone history of the people of Israel struggling against their foes, but rather our own untried experiences, our own deepest and most hidden feelings. The Psalms had all at once become *alive* to us quiet English church-goers, just as they were alive to the men who first used them some three thousand years ago. There we found a picture of the ordeal through which our own world was passing. The cruelty, the anguish, the sudden flight before the pitiless invader (11, 1-3)—all such ills had been faced once and again by this courageous little nation. This people had felt all the bitterness of treachery hidden behind soft words (55, 21); they had watched the covenant-making between powerful confederates who had little in common beyond the one desire to humble Israel and to cut her off from being a nation (83, 2-5). They had known, too, what it was to see their most sacred sanctuary dishonoured and its fair adornment ruthlessly destroyed (74, 3-7); they had witnessed the cruel havoc wrought by the enemy, and beheld the dead lying unburied about their city (79, 2, 3). They had known what it was to be carried into exile (137, 3), or to be shut up in prison (102, 20).

As we thus retraced in the Psalms our own experiences or those of our Allies, we learned with a certain shock of surprise that all this newly quickened interest in the War Poetry of the Hebrews was not without unsuspected temptations for some of us, and perhaps we discovered that we no longer shrank back, as once we should have done, from such petitions as these: "Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire that they rise not up again" (140, 9, 10); "When he is judged, let him come forth guilty" (109, 7)—or were we tempted to repeat them with a sort of hard satisfaction?

But if such a feeling as this has ever assailed us, we have had no doubt that it was an impulse that must be instantly crushed. A far subtler trial awaited many of us in the questionings and despondency of other Psalms that reflected only too truly our own most troubled, most faithless moods. The cry of the Psalmist, "Terror on every side" (31, 13) found its echo in our own hearts, and in our hasty alarm we were tempted, like those Psalmists of old, to lose faith alike in God and in man: "I said in my alarm, I am cut off from before thine eyes" (31, 22, marg.); and yet again: "I said in my alarm, All men are a lie" (116, 11, marg.).

Everywhere, moreover, was the bitter sense of injustice: "The mighty gather themselves together against me. . . . They run and prepare themselves without my fault" (59, 3, 4); and with this sense of injustice the old questionings returned again upon us: "Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" (10, 1). "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Doth his promise fail?" (77, 9, 8.) How often, too, could we reach no better conclusion than the despairing cry of that heavily burdened thinker: "When I thought how I might know this it was too painful for me" (73, 16), though at other times our questionings, like theirs, gave place to a

humbler, more gentle strain: "This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High" (77, 10). There at last we found the strong consolation we needed.

But if the Psalms thus met and reflected our moments of despondency, how richly did they inspire us with new hope and confidence! For poetry of the purest patriotism we needed not to go beyond the Hebrew Psalter. Again and again, whether in joy or in deepest calamity, the undying pride of citizenship in Zion sounds forth. "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God" (87, 3), cries the voice of rejoicing. "Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and have pity upon her dust" (102, 14). There speaks the voice of fidelity. Or again, we are shown the young manhood of the country freely offering itself, and the warrior so keen in his pursuit of the foe that he barely pauses by the wayside brook to slake his thirst (110, 3, 7).

Yet it is no blind love that inspires all this ardour of devotion, and the Psalmists' highest prayer for their sorely tried country is not the petition: "Redeem Israel out of *all his troubles*" (25, 22). There is the far more spiritual entreaty of that other prayer, *De Profundis*, which stays itself upon the faith that God, of his mercy and his plenteous redemption, "shall redeem Israel from *all his iniquities*" (130, 8).

Yes, truly, the Psalter in those years of war became living to us, as never before—the "pitiful sighing of the prisoners," and the thoughts and fears of "those appointed unto death" (79, 11); the home-thoughts of the exiles (61, 2; 137, 4, 5); the perils of the seafarers (107, 23–30); even the experiences of our airmen and of our submarine crews (139, 8–10)—all these seem to have been written here in these ancient poems just for our special need. Indeed, it would be hard to name an experi-

ence of bodily or spiritual trial that has not its counterpart in the Book of Psalms; and yet sadness is not the prevailing note of even its war-time poems.

The very Psalm that so markedly begins in the minor key, that "prayer" of the nameless patriot "when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord" (102, *title*), ends with the sublime confession of faith: "Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue" (102, 27, 28). Again and again it is proclaimed that God's government embraces the whole world (47, 7), and that it is not only righteous and merciful (7, 11; 9, 8, 9), but that it is immutable: "Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting. . . . Above the voices of many waters, the mighty breakers of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty" (93, 2, 4). The national history, in its repeated records of deliverances, coming at the moment when failure seemed certain, taught the same lesson of hope and trust: "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up alive" (124, 2, 3). But once and again strange things befell: "He turned the sea into dry land; they went through the river on foot" (66, 6): "At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both horse and chariot are cast into a dead sleep" (76, 6). Nor is it in our best-loved and most frequently quoted Psalms only, but in many a one less familiar, that we find the expression of a superb confidence in the strong protection vouchsafed by God to his oppressed servants. Take, for example, the 59th Psalm, with its three watchwords, "My strength" (vv. 9, 17), "My high tower" (vv. 9, 16, 17), "The God of my mercy" (vv. 10, 16, 17), and with so firm a trust in the certainty of final good that the poem, which began with a pitiful plea for aid in deepest distress, closes on a note of praise. And again, there is the splendid steadfastness of

the so-called "Fortress Psalm" (31), which contemplates each succeeding peril, and yet from the first word to the very last never wavers in its sober hope or belies its threefold confession of faith: "I trust in the Lord" (31, 1, 6, 14). It is needless to multiply examples, and yet we may just pause to think how either our soldiers in the field or we ourselves, the watchers at home, could have gone through these years of war without the comfort of the great Psalms of refuge—the 91st, with its tender promises of an inviolable shelter; the 46th, with its trumpet call to courage and endurance just *because* Eternal Strength is pledged to the help of the sorely pressed nation: "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (vv. 1, 7, 11).

To many a true-hearted soldier, secure in the righteousness of his cause, added confidence has come through those ringing words of the Psalms: "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (118, 6). "Mine enemies turn back in the day that I call: this I know, that God is for me" (56, 9). But have the Psalms no word of comfort concerning those to whom the sight of victory was never granted, and who fell in the strife?

So generous, so free from thought of self, is the spirit of the Psalms that even if death should prove to be the end of all things beautiful and to be desired (cp. 6, 5), they do not grudge the sacrifice, so only it be made in God's cause, for they know it is not forgotten by him: "Precious shall their blood be in his sight" (72, 14). And it is this same all-sufficient recompense that is dwelt upon in the 116th Psalm—that wonderful song of life and death and self-oblation. "What thing," so asks the Psalmist, "is precious in the sight of the Lord?" And the answer is flashed back: "The death of his faithful men"¹ (116, 15).

¹ The translation given in the *Prymer* of 1535.

Yet this cannot fully satisfy our longing hearts, and we ask whether the Psalms have no more direct message of hope to comfort those who turn to them, full of thoughts of their own "faithful" dead? They are not wholly silent, yet it must be admitted that here, where we seem to need them most, their response is faint and uncertain; or rather, it may be said, the strength of their response comes from the fuller meaning that Christian faith has thrown back upon the words. For example, the reiterated phrase of the Psalmists—"The land of the living" (27, 13; 116, 9; 142, 5); cp. also "The *light* of the living" (56, 13)—cannot legitimately be taken, as it so often has been, as the equivalent of the words of our Christian Creed: "The life of the world to come." Neither can it legitimately be contrasted, as it was by Edward the Confessor on his death-bed, with "The land of the *dead*"—that is to say, the earthly land that he was leaving. This is a perversion of the natural meaning of the words that would have been wholly foreign to the thought of the Psalmists' age and country; and yet we cannot mistake the forward look or the deep faith of that most solemn 49th Psalm which clings to the conviction that God is strong to redeem his own, even from the power of the grave (v. 15). Something, too, of the same faith shines out more or less dimly in two or three other Psalms, notably in the 16th and 73rd, which a great teacher¹ has classed as belonging to the special trio of Hebrew Psalms that transcend all the rest in their dawning belief in man's immortality (16, 49, 73).²

We have seen how throughout the whole course of the War the Psalms were speaking to us as though they had been written for our special needs. As we read them then, they

¹ Dr. Driver, *Studies in the Psalms*.

² On this whole subject see further in Chapter XIc.

seemed to us full of "wars and fightings," and there we recognized with a sort of wonder all our own hard experiences written down by men who at one time or another, in the course of their stormy history, had suffered them all. And yet the writers sprang from a race, peaceable by nature, looking with favour upon such as were "quiet in the land" (35, 20). They prayed for peace (122, 6); they had long felt the heavy burden of dwelling among those who "hated peace" and rejected it when offered (120, 6, 7). Yet peace remained their ideal, that which they set themselves to find and follow (34, 14) in the patient assurance that the same God who bestowed on his suffering people the gift of *strength* would in his own time bestow on them that other precious gift, "the blessing of *peace*" (29, 11).

And now that this blessing has at last been vouchsafed to our nation, now that strife has been crowned with victory, it is once more to the Hebrew Psalmists that we turn to find fitting expression for all our overwhelming thoughts of relief and praise and humility. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (115, 1). "The right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. Thou didst thrust sore at me that I might fall, but the Lord helped me" (118, 16, 13).

Nor is victory to be an end in itself—a poor, barren triumph. In the long years of reconstruction and world-betterment that lie before us the Psalms will still tell out their messages of hope and warning. There shall indeed be rest from the weary "breaking in and sallying forth;" there shall be a blessed silence from the "outcry in our streets." Signs of prosperity shall be seen in field and garner, and the youths and maidens shall be free to grow up in strength and beauty (144, 12-14)—not as in the old cruel days of War, when "fire devoured their young

men," and "their maidens had no marriage-song" (78, 63).

It is a beautiful ideal of national restoration, and it is not bounded by its satisfaction in material prosperity. The gladness of the 144th Psalm rises far above this, for it is "gladness with its face turned towards God"—that perfected gladness which is one with *thanksgiving*.

"Happy is the people whose God is the Lord," cries the Psalmist as he recounts the deliverances vouchsafed to God's heritage (144, 15), and the words are taken up by another singer: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (33, 12).

CHAPTER II

THE SONGS OF THE LORD

A HYMN-BOOK ! The words most likely bring to our mind a mere printed book—in itself a dull, dead thing, which springs into its fullest life only when it is employed in the service of the Church. If we would see in its most living form that which may fitly be called the “Hymn-Book of the Church” let us travel back in thought some two thousand years, to the Hill of Zion, and try to learn how great a part the Book of Psalms played in the life and worship of the Chosen People.

Let us stand outside the high wall of Herod’s gilded Temple that flashes in the sunlight of an autumn afternoon, and watch the pilgrims from the northern villages winding up the steep street of the city, laden with their harvest thank-offerings and singing as they go. It is a joyous company, happily mingling worship and holiday. In their garlanded baskets are clusters of grapes, melons, and pomegranates, flagons of wine and oil, tokens of the God-given increase of their land; and in their hands they uplift great bunches of myrtle and willow and palm, and boughs of citron with their fragrant burden, immemorial accompaniments of the autumn feast.

Here are troops of kinsfolk and near neighbours all going up together; the older lads making their own way, the tiny boys mounted on their fathers’ shoulders, in accordance with the rabbinical direction that they should come up to

Jerusalem so soon as they could thus travel. And as they climb they cheer the way with song, and could we but catch the meaning of that rhythmical rise and fall, we should recognize words as familiar to ourselves as to them. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help"—fit words for those who were climbing slowly up the steep road towards that "fair place, the hill of Zion, the joy of the whole earth," as the pilgrims deemed it. All through the long journey that has been the common aim of these united bands. "Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem." "Jerusalem, the holy city" (cp. Neh. 11, 1), which from afar off has had the prayers of her children, and whither at the set times "the tribes of the Lord go up, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord" (121, 1; 48, 2; 122, 4, all P.B.V.).

For these pilgrims, each sight they see, each act they do, holds some inner meaning. The climb up the ascent is the pathway to "the house of the Lord" (122, 1; cp. Isa. 2, 3); the hill-girt city speaks to them of God's encompassing care of his people (125, 2); the sheaves upon their shoulders symbolize the seed-time of toil and sorrow, the harvest of glad rejoicing (126, 5, 6). The very babes that take part in this sacred journey are looked upon with tender thankfulness as a God-given "heritage" (127, 3). In their freshness of youth and promise they are likened unto the olive-branches which the worshippers carry in their hands (128, 3); their lowliness and dependence is a lesson to their elders of their own relation towards the Almighty Father (131, 2).

At last the long march is ended, and the city gates are opened to admit the pilgrims. Great words are associated with the opening of these gates. "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will enter into them." And for what purpose? That the pilgrim may "give thanks unto the

Lord" (118, 19). More splendid still were the dramatic words that rang out in the Temple on the first day of each succeeding week, choir answering choir as they pictured "the Great King" (48, 2) demanding entry to his own courts. We can still listen to the summons: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and the King of glory shall come in." We can still listen to the challenge from within: "Who is this King of glory?" and at last catch the all-sufficient pass-word: "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory" (24, 7-10).

Our pilgrims, like their fathers before them, now pass into the sacred precincts, all crowded with officers and servants, with worshippers and with sightseers; and there, moving about in the midst of the crowd, they behold the white-robed priests, with their attendant ministers, intent on the preparations for the daily sacrifice. Bewildering indeed to unaccustomed eyes and ears would be the sight and the sound of the rams and bulls, the kids and lambs, the pigeons and turtle-doves, the innocent victims—sacrifices either of penitence or of thankfulness¹ waiting to be offered.

Of such a scene as this, on some day of special solemnity, and of the coming forth of the High-Priest in all his splendour to take part in the act of sacrifice, we have a description in the Book of Ecclesiasticus. "How glorious was he when the people gathered round him at his coming forth out of the sanctuary. . . . Then all the people together hastened, and fell down upon the earth on their faces, to worship their Lord, the Almighty, God Most High. The singers also praised him with their voices; in the whole house was there made sweet melody. And the people besought the

¹ Cp. the "titles" of Psalms 40 and 100 in the R.V., and on this point of the connexion between the Psalms and the sacrifices see further on pp. 102, 103.

Lord Most High, in prayer before him that is merciful, till the worship of the Lord should be ended; and so they accomplished his service" (Ecclus. 50, 5, 17, 18, 19).

That hour of sacrifice, with all its ordered pomp of music and of incense, was to the Jew his hour of highest worship, and as he stood, or prostrated himself, his prayers and praises merged into a single spiritual offering to his God.

The many different descriptions in the Bible of the Temple worship serve to bring home to us the fitness of the name under which the Psalter was known to those who first used it. The Jews called it "The Book of Prayers and Praises," and it would be a hard task to find the dividing-line between the two aspects.

Students of Jewish customs tell us that there were specially appointed Psalms for special needs, both for the Temple worship and for home use, so that by dint of continual reiteration the words must have become very familiar. The 100th Psalm, that calls to a service of joy, was associated, as the title explains, with times of thanksgiving. Another Psalm, "Blow up the trumpet in the new moon" (81), was linked with the month that marked the opening of the New Year. The anniversary of the rededication of the second Temple, after its desecration, was celebrated with mingled penitence and rejoicing in the words of the 30th Psalm.¹ The Passover was commemorated yearly in each household by the father's recitation of the song that recalled the deliverance of long ago, "when Israel went forth out of Egypt" (114, 1), but no Psalm was more entirely bound up with the Temple worship than our own Easter-Day Psalm, the 118th. Not one of the great festivals was complete without this grand confession

¹ See title of Psalm.

of trust in the might and the mercy of Jehovah; and at the Feast of Tabernacles it was sung in procession on each of the seven days. So familiar was it to the people that in it they could join their voices to those of the trained singers, and as the leaders called upon all to join in the praises of the Lord, they sent forth the great shout: "His mercy endureth for ever." Elsewhere their part was to respond only with the "Amen" or the "Hallelujah," but the closing verses of this triumph song belonged to the whole congregation.

How lasting was the impression made by these songs of the Lord upon those who had once joined in singing them at Jerusalem is shown in two poems, written by exiled Jews, both of which afterwards found their way into the national Hymn-Book. One of these exiles recalls with tears the memory of the days when he "went with the throng, and went in procession with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise" (42, 4). The other remembers with bitterness how in the time of his captivity in Babylon his "tormentors" desired to have the sacred "songs of Zion" sung for their "mirth" (137, 3). That sojourn among a heathen people has left its mark upon yet another of the poems, which pours contempt upon the senseless idols, "the work of men's hands," that had been before the eyes of the writer in Babylon (115, 4-8).

But though it was in the public worship of the Church that these "songs of the Lord" rose to their highest splendour, they were not less the private profession of every pious Jew. They were used by him in the home worship, as on the Passover night (114), and taught to the children from their earliest years, first at their mother's knee and a little later in the village schools. The words thus learned never lost their hold on the mind of the Jewish people, and traces of them reappear, over and over again,

in later writings—particularly in the so-called “Apocryphal books”—sometimes in the form of direct quotation, sometimes in the interweaving of familiar phrases from the well-studied Hymn-Book.

Thus, “the prayer” of Jonah (2, 2–9) is a mosaic of quotations from different Psalms; the Book of Job certainly draws, once at least, upon the same source (*e.g.*, Job 7, 17 and Ps. 8, 4). In the second-century Book of Tobit, in the apostrophe to the holy city, Jerusalem, “O blessed are they that love thee . . . they shall rejoice for thy peace” (Tobit 13, 9, 14), we have plainly an echo of one of the Pilgrim Psalms (122, 6). In the song of thanksgiving of the patriot Judith (chap. 16.) we find use made of verse after verse from seven different Psalms, to portray both the past suffering of her countrymen and the deliverances wrought for them by God. Again, in the better-known Book of Ecclesiasticus it is evident that the author must have pondered long over our 37th Psalm, with its repeated promises of good to those that trust in the Lord.¹

When we pass to the writings of the New Testament we are all of us aware how full they are of quotations from the Psalms. In words from the Psalms the Evangelists find many of their most striking comments on our Lord’s earthly life and sufferings; the cavilling questioners who gather round the great Teacher in the synagogue at Capernaum draw from one Psalm their argument against his teaching concerning “the corn from heaven” (78, 24); the disciples as

¹ Cp. Sirach with verses of Psalm 37 :

| | | |
|--------|---|------|
| 1, 13 | = | 37 |
| 1, 23 | = | 7–9 |
| 2, 7–9 | = | 7–9 |
| 29, 1 | = | 26 |
| 32, 16 | = | 6 |
| 32, 24 | = | 3, 5 |

they watched his purging of the Temple called to mind the saying of another Psalm: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (69, 9); while it is left to S. Paul to complete that very verse as a portrait of the sinless Christ who bore the burdens of others: "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me." When the Saviour rode into Jerusalem in the brief hour of his popular triumph, it was with shouts from the best-known of the festal Psalms that the multitudes greeted his coming: "*Hosanna!*" or as it stands in our English translation, "Save now! . . . Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (118, 25, 26).

S. Paul continually quotes from the Psalter, and is, indeed, so steeped in its language that in one of his letters (Rom. 3, 10-18) his own views find expression in a vehement outpouring, which, when closely examined, proves to be a chain of citations from not less than five different Psalms (14, 1-3; 5, 9; 140, 3; 10, 7; 36, 1).

As the Evangelists have gone to the Psalms for their commentary on our Lord's life and death, so S. Peter goes to them for his proofs of the Resurrection (cp. 1 Pet. 2, 4-7, and Ps. 118, 22, 23), and of the session at the Right Hand of God (cp. 1 Pet. 3, 22, and 110, 1).

And in this living use of the Book of Psalms the disciples were but "as their Master." When, after his Resurrection, our Saviour directed the thoughts of his disciples to the things that had of old time been "written in the Psalms" concerning himself (Luke 24, 44), he was letting them share in what had been throughout his earthly life his own study. There, as we cannot but believe, he had found foreshadowed his mission, both as the first-born son of the Father (cp. Matt. 3, 17 and 17, 5, with Pss. 2, 7, and 89, 27) and as the Son of man (cp. Matt. 16, 13, and Ps. 8, 4). There he had found the witness to his Kingship, as true son of David, and yet David's lord (cp. Matt. 22, 42, 43, and Ps. 110, 1),

and there he had been prepared for the recognition of that Kingship by the voices of the innocent, God-taught babes in the Temple (Matt. 21, 15, 16, and Ps. 8, 4). There, too, he had traced the predictions of his rejection by his own (Matt. 21, 42, and Ps. 118, 22, 23); of his betrayal by the familiar friend whom he had trusted (John 13, 18, and Ps. 41, 9); of the causeless hatred of those whom he would fain have saved (John 15, 24, 25, and Ps. 69, 4). From the Psalms, too, it was that he drew the words that told of his hour of bitterest agony (Matt. 27, 46, and Ps. 22, 1), and those other words of comfort, on which he stayed his parting soul (Luke 23, 46, and Ps. 31, 5).

The more deeply we ponder our Lord's use of the Psalms, the more we shall come to feel that his early disciples were in harmony with their Master's spirit and example when they ventured to complete the sacred Prayer that he himself had taught them, with added words drawn from the Book of Psalms.

Perhaps to some of us it has been a trial to find that in the Revised Translation of the Bible the Lord's Prayer ends with the petition for deliverance from evil, without the glorious ascription of praise which so early came to be associated with it that to us it seems, almost of right, to belong to the prayer itself. By what gradual steps the great doxology came to be added to the Prayer we cannot exactly tell, but we may not unreasonably seek its source in the ancient Hymn-Book of the Jewish Church, in words found in the 145th Psalm. Few Psalms can have been better known, for it was used thrice daily in public worship, and it is this Psalm that speaks of *the kingdom*, and *the power*, and *the glory*, of the *everlasting* kingdom of God (145, 11-13).

Enough has been said, even in these few pages, to show how the Book of Psalms was intertwined with the national

and the personal life of the Jewish people. We know by experience how it has been intertwined with the national and personal life of generations of Christians.

Let us now try to understand something of the way in which this famous Hymn-Book came into being, and of its long literary history.

CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF A HYMN-BOOK

BEFORE asking ourselves how the Psalter reached its present shape, we will consider the making of a twentieth-century Hymn-Book, and, to do this the better, we will suppose that we ourselves have undertaken the task of preparing a complete hymnal, for public worship and for private use, and this whole chapter shall be occupied in planning out our methods of work. To some this may seem a mere by-path, leading us very far away from the history of the Psalms; yet, when we get back once more into the main track, we may discover that we have advanced farther than we supposed towards our goal, and have unknowingly learned something of the way in which the Book of Psalms came into being.

The first point to decide is, How are we to *begin* our undertaking? Most assuredly not by attempting to compose a whole new book for the purpose! Could there be a task more certainly foredoomed to failure? For a single author to produce some hundreds of poems that shall adequately meet the varying occasions of human life, and all the varying spiritual needs of countless men and women, is plainly a task beyond the skill of the most gifted poet ever known. No one mind could possibly attune itself to express all the infinite range of human need and aspiration, though there are many, many minds that can express different aspects of that boundless need; there are many

humble singers who have their tiny message for some heart that may be closed to the words of the finer poet.

It is plain, therefore, that if we are to succeed in our vast undertaking, our office must be that of a compiler, an "editor," rather than that of author. Our work, in short, is to make a collection of sacred verse, as good and as complete as it lies in our power to make it; and to this end we must set ourselves to gather up suitable material from all available sources.

To us English people of the twentieth century, with a long and rich literary heritage behind us, the sources open are so numerous that our chief difficulty will be that of selection. The field of English sacred verse alone covers more than a thousand years, but if we decide to admit translations from other languages our choice will become yet more difficult. The Latin hymns will carry us back to the first centuries of the Christian era; the Greek hymns in S. Luke's Gospel carry us back to the Nativity itself; the Hebrew Psalms carry us back a thousand years before Christ.

Undoubtedly our Hymn-Book will lose much in value and richness if we do not open our doors to translations, from the dead languages on the one hand, or from the living languages of France and Germany and Denmark, of Africa and India, on the other. Nevertheless, it will simplify our task, and it will also suit our special purpose better, if we decide to confine our selections to *English* verse, of whatever period, and to put all thought of translations out of our plan. Even so, we shall have, as we have said, a range of more than a thousand years.

We have next to consider how we shall set about collecting the material wherewith to form our Hymn-Book. We shall be surprised to find how many different storehouses we have to ransack. A history-book or a volume of memoirs may contain verses on national or family or religious subjects

that will perhaps serve our purpose. A magazine of the current month or a daily newspaper may contain some fine stanzas worth preserving; we may find unpublished lines of much beauty and feeling among the papers of a dead friend; some wedding or burial hymn that has been written for a particular need is found to meet the needs of many in like circumstances, and is passed on from hand to hand till at last it becomes common property.

Then, too, we shall turn to the collected works of any great poet whom we think likely to be suitable for our purpose; but, above all, we shall make use of existing collections of religious verse that have come down to us from an earlier time. No one of these early Hymn-Books will quite satisfy us as it stands; we shall probably not wish to include all the poems that we find in any one of them, and certainly we shall wish to add some of a later date, or from private sources. None the less, we shall find that our labours are considerably lightened by means of these earlier collections.

But now, supposing that all our material for the Hymn-Book lies ready to hand—all our own separate collections and all the published collections that we can find—how, then, shall we set to work to arrange it to the best advantage? There are many possible methods open to us. We may put all the poems of one author together; or we may group by subjects; or we may attempt to follow a chronological order. But the inexperienced editor will soon learn that, though there are many possible arrangements, each arrangement in turn presents unforeseen difficulties! If a large proportion of the verse selected prove to be anonymous, the method of classifying according to authorship must perforce be abandoned, and where the authors are, for the most part, unknown, the chronological order also fails us, for it becomes largely a matter of guess-work, a

following out of possible clues and of inferences from style and language not always to be relied upon.

One or two examples may serve to illustrate the difficulties of establishing the date of anonymous verse. For our purpose we will take two poems, both of which made their first appearance in periodical literature, though both of them have now been taken up into many collections of verse. The one example shall be from the pen of a world-famous writer, Rudyard Kipling; the other the work of an obscure soldier-poet, M. W. Howland. We will suppose, however, that we know nothing at all as to the authorship or circumstances of either piece, and have in each case to assign the date from a close examination of the internal evidence of the copies of the two poems that have come into our hands. Let us take first the great lines with the warning refrain: "Lest we forget, lest we forget!" How much of the history that underlies these words can be read in the poem itself? This much at least emerges. Plainly it is written at a moment of great national prosperity and rejoicing, but plainly, also, it is a call to the nation to whom it is addressed to rejoice in soberness of thought and word. It is easy enough to catch the spirit of the poem. Is it equally easy to determine with certainty the occasion which called it forth? The central verses—Nos. 2, 3, and 4—with their solemn scriptural appeal, contain nothing that might not have been suggested by the dispersion of the Spanish Armada, or that might not have occurred to some pious-minded poet in the days of our naval wars against Holland in the seventeenth century. In the opening verse we meet the words "Dominion over palm and pine," and we shall ask ourselves what dominion we could claim in any land of the "palm" before our rule extended to the East. But the closing verse gives a valuable hint as to date. The condemnation of the "heathen heart that puts her trust in

reeking tube and iron shard" shows incidentally that we have passed from the days of the old wooden ships to the period of ironclads, and so we cannot assign our poem to an *earlier* date than the latter half of the nineteenth century. At first sight the verses appear to suggest a rejoicing for some great victory—possibly the ending of the South African War in 1902? But a single word in the second stanza gives the clue to the real occasion. The line "The captains and the *kings* depart" reminds us that the poem has no immediate reference to either peace or war, but was written for the celebration of Queen Victoria's sixty years' Jubilee, when kings and rulers and warriors from many a continental nation came together to do honour to the Queen of England.

Our second example is a very simple little poem, which shows on the face of it that it is written by a dying man who has led a stirring life of endurance, but who knows that his "half-day's work," his brief earthly life, is nearing its end:

"I am not eager, bold, nor strong,
All that is past;
I am ready not to do,
At last, at last.
My half-day's work is done,
And this is all my part."

But trust and patience are with him still, and the verses end thus:

"I give a patient God
My patient heart,
And grasp his banner still,
Though all its blue be dim;
These stripes, no less than stars,
Lead after him."

How much the few lines tell of the writer's story! We are sure that he was a soldier, a young and brave soldier, in the United States Army, proud to serve under his country's

flag, the Stars and Stripes, and now lying mortally wounded or spent with sickness in his country's cause. All that is important in the history of the little poem is quite clear to us, even without the help of an appended note to the effect that the manuscript was found under the pillow of a soldier who died in hospital. Our natural impulse is to connect the writer with the historic War of Secession—and in so doing we shall be right—but there is no evidence in the lines themselves to prove this surmise, and, judging by the poem alone, the writer may equally well have been a man of a younger generation, one of the far smaller number of American soldiers who gave their lives in the now wellnigh forgotten Spanish-American War of 1898.

We must beware of falling into the tempting error of supposing that every famous and inspiring poem was called forth by some specific and famous occasion! The springs that have given it birth in the poet's mind are often hidden from the reader, and even if they are revealed to him they may seem wholly inadequate—nay, even unworthy of the stream. Before the days of "Browning Societies" hundreds of readers had perplexed themselves over the original of *The Lost Leader*, only to be dismayed in after-years by Browning's half-laughing, half-ashamed admission that it had indeed been prompted by Wordsworth's acceptance of the laureateship.

If, then, there is difficulty, even with contemporary verse, in deciding from internal evidence the particular occasion which gave it birth, it is obvious that in dealing with times far removed from our own all these difficulties will be intensified, from lack of detailed knowledge.

We shall probably, therefore, be forced to abandon chronological order in the arrangement of our Hymn-Book, and shall in despair fall back upon the easier plan of grouping by subject-matter. For example, we may place to-

gether poems suited to times of public or private sorrow, or, on the other hand, to times of special rejoicing. One class may be occupied with the glories of the natural world; another will embrace such hymns as may seem to us specially suitable for use in united worship; while a small number of more personal poems, which we might describe as "religious meditations," must be kept apart for private use. But subdivisions suggest themselves at an alarming rate. No classification seems wholly satisfactory, and in one or two cases we may decide to take some very small existing collection as it stands, and to incorporate it, wholly or in part, into our own larger and more modern book.

By this time we shall have very thoroughly confused our previous attempt at chronological order, though something of it may yet be traceable in those small earlier collections which we have just embodied. Some of these may show signs of emanating, if not from a single author, yet from a particular "school of thought"—the "Evangelical school," shall we say, or the "Tractarian"?—and may thus afford us a clue to their period, if not to their author.

As a matter of experience it has been proved over and over again that no important Hymnal can be grouped on hard-and-fast lines. Partial ignorance as to authorship and origin makes havoc of any strict system of chronological order; the variety of subject-matter that is sometimes embraced in a single poem baffles the upholder of a rigid classification by subjects, and in the end it may be safely affirmed that the only sound rules for the compiler of a Hymn-Book intended for general congregational use are religious edification and practical convenience. To the literary critic his methods may seem annoyingly haphazard, but in so far as they subserve the ends proposed they are justified. The task of an editor is not necessarily that of an antiquarian, and for the sake of his particular aims he

may even be justified in making certain alterations and adaptations in his material.

We shall see in the following chapter that in the final recension of the world's most famous Hymn-Book the unknown "Editor" did make use of all these differing methods of arrangement, and did not shrink from a large liberty in handling his material, in order to produce a Hymn-Book that should be suited to the varying needs of his co-religionists, whether worshipping in the second Temple at Jerusalem or in the synagogues scattered over the face of the earth.

CHAPTER IV

THE ANNOTATED EDITION

THOSE of us who habitually read the Psalms in the stately and unvaried form of the Prayer-Book translation enjoy indeed high privileges in the majesty of the diction and the musical rhythm of the verses. Yet those who never look beyond this noble version—which is rightly the glory of English Churchmen—necessarily lose many of those helps to a fuller understanding of the history and growth of the Psalter that come naturally in the way of those who habitually use the Bible version, whether of 1611 or of 1885.

To put the difference briefly, it is like studying the works of some master-poet out of the text alone, in a noble but not highly exact translation, framed to serve a particular purpose; or on the other hand, studying the same work in a more exact, if less musical translation, and with the help provided by generations of ancient commentators.

As to the intrinsic value of any given collection of notes on a great work, this is a matter that can only be decided by scholarship and experience, but marginal notes have at least the merit of stimulating attention and raising questions in the mind of the reader.

For example, the value of the so-called “titles” of the Psalms, the statements as to source, authorship or occasion, the liturgical directions, the meaning of such a word as the perplexing “Selah,” may be reasonably disputed from the historical point of view, or counted as nothing from the purely spiritual point of view, but

undeniably they do tend to keep the mind alert. They do suggest, to even the average reader, problems of Jewish history and worship and literary methods that are all hidden from sight beneath the symmetrical arrangement of the Prayer-Book version, where every verse is drilled into uniformity by the colon that divides it into two halves, and where the 150 Psalms are distinguished one from another only by their numbers and by the Latin rendering of their opening words.

We have called this chapter "The Annotated Edition" of the Psalter, and of all such annotated editions by far the most important, the most studied and discussed, is that with which we are familiar in our English Bible. The Hebrew original from which our translation was made does not represent either the first or the final edition of the Hymn-Book of the Jewish Church, but it has come to be looked upon as the most authoritative edition. What we may account the actual "final edition" (though most likely very little later in date than that Hebrew edition) is the famous Greek translation known as the Septuagint, probably made early in the second century before Christ, which adds one additional Psalm to the recognized 150, and gives certain annotations as to reputed authorship and particular purpose. Here then, in the Septuagint, or "LXX," we have the Hebrew Psalter in its final form, for all subsequent editions are at least *liable* to have been modified by Christian influences and interpretations.

So much, then, we may claim to have arrived at as to the date of the final edition of the Book of Psalms, but if we go on to ask *when* the Psalms were first collected into book-form we shall find it impossible to speak with any certainty, though scholars are gradually throwing more and more light upon that long and complex process.

One very simple assumption we may safely make, and it

will help us not a little in following out the literary history of the Psalms, and it is this: A book that is freely annotated, from several different points of view, is not in the least likely to be what we should call "a first edition." Let us take once more the analogy of a Hymn-Book, and imagine a book furnished with notes as to the authors of the different hymns, and the names of their accustomed tunes, with directions as to their use on particular occasions; we shall be clear that we have not lighted on a very primitive form of Hymnal. It is only when poems have won a distinct place for themselves that questions begin to be asked about their origin and use, and their transmission to later generations; and the more famous they are, the longer their history, the more necessary and difficult it becomes to decide upon the worth of the various traditions that have grown up round about them. Therefore, in the case of every famous classic, annotation has followed annotation, and the different strata have all to be examined and classified.

In the case of poems that have been brought together, not merely for their literary merit, but to serve some specific purpose, such as private devotion or public worship, it naturally happens that all these difficulties are still further enhanced, for in such cases successive editors have had more regard to convenience and edification than to purely literary considerations, and have felt themselves free to alter and add, to combine and rearrange, so as best to suit the needs of the moment. Such alterations of the text are continually made in every English Hymn-Book intended for use in church, as we shall see more fully in the next chapter. Earlier, perhaps long-discarded collections are drawn upon, and are modified at will to suit the newer collection. In some of our Hymn-Books the source of the debt is acknowledged and the author's name recorded, but the large number of even well-known hymns that come to be

grouped under the heading "Anonymous" shows how often but little care is bestowed on the preservation of the writer's name, and how many a deeply treasured hymn has survived purely on its merits.

Yet, notwithstanding all these difficulties in tracing out the literary history of any very famous and very ancient book, we find that those who have given close and scholarly study to the Book of Psalms in its present completed form are able in some measure to trace out the successive steps in its long history, and we find also that that history is very much what the experiences of modern compilers of Hymnals would lead us to expect (see previous chapter).

The principles which served us there will help us again here, and even in many points of detail there is also a curious similarity. In the first place, it was admitted that no important Hymn-Book that has stood the test of time and served for congregational use was ever the single-handed work of any one man. Such Hymn-Books have indeed been written—notably by Keble and Wesley—but "The Christian Year" was never intended for public use, and the famous Wesleyan Hymn-Book, though long retaining the *name* of its principal author, Charles Wesley, was early forced to open its doors to other verse-writers. Experience has proved the truth of our contention that the permanent value of a Hymn-Book largely depends upon its power of presenting religious truth in many forms and from many standpoints, so as to appeal to differing types of mind. No single poet, however gifted, can suffice for so great a task. Therefore, it must be the outcome of different minds, and the editor who would make a noble and representative collection of sacred poems will look back, past the verse of his own age alone, and seek out all that is best in the collections of bygone generations.

And this great task must once have been undertaken for

the whole Church by some nameless Editor, when he brought together in their present form the 150 Psalms that now stand in our English Bibles.

Do we know anything as to this Editor ? When he lived ? Where he lived ? On what principles he made his famous collection ? No ; we cannot answer these questions. Like many another Editor, he is anonymous. We cannot tell so much as his country or his date, for we cannot be quite certain whether he accomplished his task before the Maccabean War of Independence or just after that tremendous struggle, in the days when the Temple had been purified from the pollutions of the foreign invader, and the holy worship restored to its old dignity and beauty. Supposing, then, that this unknown Editor included in his Hymn-Book any poems—be they many or few—of this exact period, the collection cannot have been finally completed until after the year 165 B.C. On this point, however, scholars are divided, some holding that there is sufficient evidence to prove that the entire 150 Psalms were already incorporated into the Greek translation a generation before the days of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers. “The Canon was already closed,” so argue some ; but as the exact date of the formation of the Septuagint is not agreed upon, this belief, for the present at least, remains disputable. The arguments on both sides should be studied in any good recent commentary.

The actual difference in *time* is not very great in a book with so long a history as the Psalter. In the one case, our Editor must have done his work about 160 years before Christ ; in the other, we may place him some fifty years earlier.

But again it may be asked, If we know so very little about this assumed Editor, what reason have we for supposing that he ever existed at all ? Well, in the first place, it is clear that 150 poems, bearing unmistakable signs of

different authors and of different periods, cannot have come together fortuitously. If we find in the collection as we know it evident signs of classification, we shall be convinced that *some* Editor must have been at work, and, indeed, scholars who have given much study to this matter have thrown an almost startling blaze of light on his very methods of work, and, by starting from the Book of Psalms in its completed form, have succeeded in travelling far back towards its early beginnings. As to details, there are, and always must be, considerable differences of opinion, but this new method of studying the history of the Psalms is of fascinating interest, and suggests a sensation akin to looking back along the ages through a powerful telescope.

Let us assume, then, that our Editor was a Jew, living in Jerusalem at the time when the Temple worship was being reinstated after its three years' suspension (168-165 B.C.), and when a demand had arisen for a standard Hymn-Book, suited to the requirements alike of the Temple at Jerusalem, and of the various synagogues in Alexandria and at Rome, or wherever in East or West Jewish worshippers met together.

There was ample material lying ready to his hand in existing Hymn-Books; there were also contemporary poems, and some floating pieces of various dates that had not hitherto found their way into any collection.

It is a strange thought that we English readers of the Psalms, standing more than twenty centuries apart from this nameless Israelite Editor, can yet speak with a reasonable amount of certainty as to his methods of work, and as to the very books—some ten or eleven of them as it would appear—that he handled. One of these books was, we cannot doubt, what we may call "The Musical Edition of the Psalter." We must all of us have noticed that certain Psalms are, in the Bible Version, marked "For the Chief

Musician," or the "Precentor," as we might say, and it is in the headings to these fifty-five Psalms, and *in none of the others*, that there occur such perplexing terms as "Alamoth" (46), or "Set to the Sheminith" (6 and 12), or the recurring "Set to Al-tashheth" (57, 58, 59, and 75), or those more easily understood directions, "On stringed instruments" (4 and 6), or "With the wind instruments" (5).

We know by our own experience that every musical edition of the Hymn-Book uses the musical vocabulary of its own day, and we also know how this vocabulary tends to change, and how old terms fall into disuse, and even become unintelligible to another generation. Something of the sort has happened to the terms used in the Precentor's or Chief Musician's collection. Gradually they became archaisms, and the Greek translators of the Psalms seem to have found difficulties in some of them. It is clear, however, that in the age of the Chronicler (c. 300 B.C.) to which they seem to belong they were still living terms, in use in the Temple services, as we shall see in the chapter on Music.

But the standing perplexity of the Precentor's Book is the word "Selah," which is a marked characteristic of this particular collection, though not wholly confined to it. Most commonly this word is found in the "titles," where we can easily ignore it, but not infrequently it is embedded in the Psalm itself. Apparently it perplexed the Greek translators, as it has perplexed each one of us in our childhood, and there have been endless differences of interpretation. A very generally accepted explanation regards it as a direction to the musicians and singer to strike up afresh, after a pause, made to give emphasis to what has just been sung. Others regard it as preparatory to a doxology that is about to follow. It seems tolerably certain that it had a religious as well as a purely musical significance, but what that precise significance was is lost to us. We shall

perhaps not be so very far astray from its original purpose if we take it as a sort of equivalent of our "Sursum Corda."

We are so much accustomed to speak of each one of the 150 poems in the Psalter as a *Psalm* that it does not occur to us that this word had originally a technical use of its own, and is applied in the Hebrew Psalter to only fifty-seven pieces out of the whole number. This word (*Mizmor*) is supposed to indicate poems set to instrumental accompaniment, and is therefore more or less distinguished from the simpler term "song." Both words are found in the headings of the Psalms, and not infrequently both are attached to the same poem (*e.g.*, 48), but we may recall the differing titles of our own books of religious verse—"Sacred Songs," "Psalms and Hymns," and the like—and we can perceive the reasonableness of the conjecture that a collection of verse arranged for instrumental accompaniment should have incorporated various existing "songs," such as the famous marriage-ode, the so-called "Song of loves" (45), or such a noble summons to proclaim the mighty doings of God as the 66th Psalm.

Here, then, was a second Hymnal, lying ready to the hand of our Editor, a collection probably slightly earlier in date and less elaborate than the Precentor's Book, but, like it, concerned with the musical rendering of the words. Our first thought is that both these collections must have been connected with the Temple worship, but we must bear in mind that there are strong arguments for believing that the compilation of the Psalter (we are not speaking of the date of particular Psalms) belongs to a period after the Exile, when the Jews were already scattered in many lands, and when for many among them the centre of worship could no longer be the Temple, with its highly organized music, but rather the synagogues, great and small, in East and West. It was clearly impossible to reproduce in the synagogues all

the pomp of the Temple worship, but so music-loving a people was most unlikely to drop all music out of its services, and some scholars are of opinion that both these "musical editions" of the Psalter were prepared for synagogue use, and were adapted for a simpler type of service than was practised in the Temple.

But our Editor had also before him a third Hymnal, collected, it is clear, by some earlier worker in the same field—living, it may be, in the days of the Captivity, possibly at Babylon itself—whose separate identity is revealed to us by one tiny clue alone. It is a clue so small that we should never have noticed it for ourselves; so strong that when once our attention has been drawn to it we can never fail to notice it, whether in our accustomed Prayer-Book rendering or in the Bible version. In our chapters on the Creed we shall see (XIA.) that the Psalter uses two distinct words to represent the Divine Name—"Lord," and "God"—and this distinction is made quite clear in our English Bibles. The word by far the most generally used, and always (in the Bible versions) printed in capital letters, is LORD (in the Hebrew "Jehovah"). The other word is God (in the Hebrew "Elohim").

Now turn over the pages of the Psalter from Psalm 42 to 83, and observe how rarely the word LORD appears in them, and how continually your eye catches the word "God." Then look through the rest of the Psalter, and you will find the proportions completely reversed.

Perhaps we ask, what difference does that make? Why may not one poet have used this word, and another that, if it does not alter the sense? It does not alter the sense, but it does show us that we have a different Editor at work, who for some reason preferred the use of the name Elohim to that of Jehovah, and we have an unmistakable proof that the preference came from the Editor, and not from the

original poets. If we look first at the 14th Psalm and then at the 53rd, we shall discover, what perhaps we have not all of us noticed before, that it is the same Psalm twice over, with certain alterations, and that while in the earlier Book the word LORD occurs three times, in the later Book it is each time changed into "God." No mere copyist would have made such a change three times over; therefore it must be the deliberate act of some person unknown, and from the further fact that this word "Elohim" is of so much more frequent occurrence in one special section of the Psalter than elsewhere, it is inferred that this section was at some time separately edited by some other hand. Shall we ever know the reasons that led to this change? It is true that in our own Hymn-Books we find editorial changes of something the same kind, as, for example, where "Jesus, Son of *Mary*," is changed into "Jesus, Son of *David*"; or where "With the *cross* of Jesus" is changed into "*Looking* unto Jesus"; but such alterations as these have been made from theological reasons, and there is no ground to believe that in the case of these Psalms there is any theological reason for the changes made. Some of us, again, may recall what we have read of the ceremonial observed by pious Jewish scribes before daring to write the name of Jehovah, but this practice belonged to a later period, and was subsequent to the formation of the completed Psalter. It is still possible that some day a clue may be discovered to the motive that prompted this particular Editor to make such a change. For the present our chief interest in the matter is that it shows us that there was yet another Hymn-Book—"The Elohistick Psalter" it is sometimes called—lying before the final Editor.

So far we have not got much light on the matter of *dates*; neither have we travelled far upon our long backward journey towards the days of King David. These three separate Hymn-Books whose existence we have assumed,

are all of them of more recent date than that great dividing-line, the Babylonian Captivity. But a moment's reflection will show us that the period of the *compilation* of a Hymn-Book gives us only the most partial guidance to the date of the individual hymns which it contains. The limit on the later side is plainly absolute; there is no such rigid limit on the earlier side, and, judging by the analogy of modern Hymn-Books, we shall not expect to find that the hymns in "The Precentor's Book" are all of them contemporary pieces. We shall rather expect to find that in the majority of cases the *words* had already had a longer or shorter independent existence before they were taken up into one or other of the musical editions. And again, arguing from analogy, we shall be prepared to find the three collections to some extent overlapping. Each one will show distinctive features of its own, but, as in the case of "Hymns Ancient and Modern," the "Hymnal Companion," and the "English Hymnal," much common material will be found, though naturally the latest collection of the three is likely to drop a good deal of the earlier matter in order to make room for "poems of to-day." In the Psalter it is evident that all three compilers have been drawing upon the same sources. For example, there are those Psalms (many of them singularly joyous) inscribed "Of the sons of Korah" (42-49, 84, 85, 87, 88); that sterner, more subjective selection marked "Of Asaph" (50, 73-83), or the half-dozen poems known as "Michtams"—that is, "Golden Pieces" (16, 56-60; cp. our English collection, "The Golden Treasury"), and the thirteen scattered Psalms known as "Maschils," or poetic "Meditations," which are found in four out of the five "Books" of the Psalter.

Here, then, we find ourselves confronted with four more collections of verse, but all the four are comparatively small, and in looking through the entire Psalter, and

especially through the first half of it, the heading that most frequently meets our eye is "Of David." At last, then, it would seem, we are within sight of the original Hymn-Book of the Jewish Church, the nucleus of all later collections. But we must beware of jumping to hasty conclusions, and of supposing that all the seventy-four Psalms thus distinguished can claim King David for their author. At the first glance it looks as clear a statement of fact as though we should find in a present-day Hymnal, "Recessional, *by* Rudyard Kipling." We are told, however, by scholars that the Hebrew word here translated "*Of David*" does not necessarily imply authorship, but that more probably it indicates the particular collection whence it was taken—a collection associated, in no very clearly defined manner, with the name of some well-known poet or musician of an earlier day, either the Poet-King himself; or Asaph, "the chief of the Levites" (1 Chron. 15, 16, 17; cp. 16, 4, 5); or Korah, one of a great musical family (1 Chron. 6, 22, 31), both of whom are mentioned by the Chronicler, many centuries after David's death, as having been appointed by the King himself to be "over the service of song," and to "thank and praise the Lord, in the tent of meeting, before the ark of the Lord" (cp. 1 Chron. 6, 6, 31-39).

Modern scholarship is increasingly tending to the belief that all these marginal notes on the origin of the various Psalms are more concerned with the different collections in which they were found than with the names of the individual authors. It is as though a Hymn-Book compiler of our day should content himself with summarily referring to his sources as: "English Hymnal," "Ancient and Modern," "Wesley's Hymns," "Sankey's Songs," though he no more means to imply one sole author in the last two instances than he does in the first two. He simply indicates the whole

collection by its popular name. For the present, therefore, we will set aside all questions of authorship, together with the notes connecting certain Psalms with particular events in the history of David, and will turn back to ask what justification there is for the statement previously made (p. 39) that many of the Psalms were found in more than one collection. A couple of examples will suffice. Take, for instance, the 56th Psalm, with its various annotations. The first of them is: "For the Chief Musician," showing that it was in the Precentor's Book, and then follows the name of the tune to which it was there set, "The silent dove." It is further marked as coming from an earlier book, that small collection of "Golden" Psalms (*Michtams*) which are all of them linked with the name of "David," and this particular poem is furnished with an historical note as to the circumstances which it is believed to commemorate, "When the Philistines took him in Gath."

Or for a second illustration, look at the 75th Psalm—that most solemn warning of the Divine judgments—and draw from the "title" something of its long history. First of all it seems to have had an independent existence as a sacred "song." Then it was apparently incorporated in the collection known as "Asaph's"; later on it passed into the Precentor's Book, and was provided with a favourite tune, known as "Destroy it not" (*Al-tashheth*), and at length the final Editor gave it the place that it now holds.

But we must not suppose that this unknown Editor did nothing more than rearrange the "Ancient" hymns of his nation. It may be, as we have already said (p. 33), that he inserted some half-dozen or more as "Modern" as was possible: contemporary verse written during the course of the Maccabean struggle.¹ Be this as it may, it is certain

¹ For example, one scholar (Briggs) tentatively ascribes to this period Psalms 33, 118, 129, 149, and portions of three other Psalms, while he rejects others that are often supposed to be included.

that he did not overlook the very considerable collection of latter-day Temple hymns, known to the Jews as the "Hallel," or "Hallelujah Psalms," from their marked use of the phrase, "Praise ye Jah." These Hallelujah Psalms, twenty-two in number, are all of them found in the later part of the Psalter, from the 104th Psalm to the very last of all, but the distinctive word "Hallelujah" has accidentally slipped out of two or three Psalms where we should naturally expect to find it, and where it is duly shown in the Greek translation.

Nor did this Editor overlook the lovely collection of "folk-songs" or "pilgrim songs," as they have been called, sung by the joyous company of pilgrims as they travelled up year by year to the Passover at Jerusalem, and climbed "the Hill of Zion." These fifteen "Songs of Ascent" (120-134) (as they are described in the headings) are supposed to belong to a time somewhat later than the last of the Old Testament prophets, perhaps to the time of that famous "Simon the High-Priest" of whom we read in Ecclesiasticus (chap. 50).

It does not appear that our Editor had any shrinking from anonymous poems, or "Orphans," as the Jews quaintly called those Psalms unprovided with explanatory "titles." He included not a few such, especially in the latter part of his great Hymn-Book—praises of God's glory in creation (*e.g.*, 33, 104, 148), or praises of the glory of God's word (*e.g.*, 119). However little we know of this final Editor to whom we owe so immense a debt of gratitude, we can at least think of him as one who shared David's delight in the natural beauty of God's world (*e.g.*, 2 Sam. 23, 1-4), and also Ezra's reverent delight in the revived study of God's word: one who not only found room in his book for the longest of all the Psalms (the 119th), but who deliberately violated all chronological order that he might place in the forefront of his great collection of "Hymns Ancient and

Modern " a comparatively new poem of unknown authorship, with intent to make the keynote of his whole work the blessedness of those who know and keep "the law of the Lord" (1).

Something after this fashion, then, and by the loving labours of many generations, these 150 Psalms, that have furnished forth the prayers and praises of God's servants for more than 2,000 years, were welded into a single volume; and such as it is known to us, so also was it known to our Lord and Master.

CHAPTER V_A

QUESTIONING THE PSALMS THEMSELVES

(Language and History)

THE question may have occurred to some readers of the foregoing chapters, "If the writers of the Psalms are unknown, how can scholars speak of *earlier* and *later* Psalms? How can they establish any sort of scheme of chronology?"

In the first place it may be said that in "The Five Books" of the Psalter—each one concluded by some form of doxology—there does appear to have been some attempt on the part of the unknown final Editor to preserve a rough chronological order, so that what we might call the most "modern" hymns, and those best fitted for congregational singing, are to be found in Books IV. and V., beginning at Psalm 90, and going on to the last Psalm in the collection. These are smoother and more polished in form than those found in Book I. It does not require a very practised ear to be conscious of the broken sentences (*e.g.*, 7, 4), the sorrowful and passionate questionings, the appeals for justice (see Pss. 10, 12, 13, 35), that seem to carry us into the very innermost soul of some deeply tried fellow-man, "pouring out his heart by himself" (cp. 42, 4, P.B.V.).

The differences between these two divisions are so striking that when our attention has been awakened to it, we shall wonder that we did not find it out for ourselves. Even we who know our Psalms only in English can feel something of the difference in poetical form, and can understand why a

Hebrew professor once advised a couple of tyros, stumbling over the Psalms in their proper tongue, to begin their studies with the 90th Psalm.

There remains the central division—Books III. and IV. (Pss. 42–89)—which in some measure share the characteristics of both the earlier and the later division. Some of the Psalms best suited for united worship are found here (*e.g.*, 47, 48, 84). So are some of the deepest and most heart-searching meditations on the problems of human life (*e.g.*, 49, 88). Moreover, the whole outlook is *larger* than in Book I. It is no longer the Psalmist's own wrongs and perils and perplexities that chiefly occupy his thoughts. He knows that what he suffers his countrymen are likewise suffering, and thus we find that many of the Psalms in Books III. and IV. are filled with the most splendid patriotism.

A very helpful and easily remembered summary of what has been said above is given in a sentence from Dean Kirkpatrick's Introduction to his book on the Psalms (p. lviii.): "Speaking broadly and generally, the Psalms of the First Division are *personal*, those of the Second *national*, those of the Third *liturgical*. There are numerous exceptions. . . ."

But in following the guidance of this sentence it behoves us to pay attention to its opening caution—"Speaking broadly." Nor must we overlook the warning which immediately follows—"There are numerous exceptions." Indeed, the very first Psalm in the Psalter is one of these exceptions, for, as we have already seen (p. 43), it is a late Psalm, purposely placed in the forefront of the whole collection.

But "exceptions to the rule" are not peculiar to the Psalms. They face us in every new study, and when we have got a fairly firm hold on the "general rules," they no longer daunt us as much as they did at the first. We shall

therefore go upon the assumption that the later Editors of the Psalms had *some* sort of chronological order in view, though this part of their scheme has been crossed and tangled to a bewildering extent by the introduction of other and different schemes of classification (see pp. 27, 28), so that sometimes the classification is by *subject* (e.g., the National Psalms, 74-83; or the "Pilgrim Psalms," 120-134).

Scholars, therefore, in seeking to determine the period to which any given Psalm belongs, give all due weight to the opinions of the old Jewish editors and annotators, as shown in the grouping of the Psalms, and by the traditions preserved in the "titles," but they bring to bear upon each separate Psalm many other tests. Of three such tests we shall now speak more fully:

I. The Test of Language.

II. The Test of Historical Allusions.

III. The Test of Relation to Other Books of the Bible.

First Test: Language.—If we have studied any handbook on English Poetry, from Cædmon to Shakespeare—that is, from the seventh to the sixteenth centuries—we realize how great in that interval are the changes in the language. We know that for Cædmon we practically require a translation; that up to the time of Chaucer we most of us depend on a vocabulary; and that it is not until we reach the Elizabethan age that words and spelling look entirely natural to our eye.

With these nine centuries of English verse, let us for a moment compare the nine centuries that embrace the extreme limits of the Book of Psalms—from David in the eleventh century B.C. to the possible Maccabean Psalms in the second century B.C.¹—though in all probability the greater number of the poems may be dated within far

¹ Psalm 90, described as "The Prayer of Moses," is here assumed to be of later date than is claimed by the title.

narrower limits than this, somewhere between the eighth century and the fourth. Judging by analogy, we should expect to find very obvious *linguistic* differences between "earlier" and "later" Psalms. Differences indeed there are, but they are very far from being as obvious as in the case of our English verse.

One of the reasons why scholars reject the ascription of the 90th Psalm to Moses is that it does not show the archaisms that might naturally be looked for in so ancient a poem; but, speaking generally, the classical standard of Hebrew poetry was early set, and later poets strove to imitate the style that marked the "Golden Age" of their literature. Yet, while the literary style as a whole may maintain its characteristics, *new words* spring up into common use, and gradually find their way even into poetry, and may thus unconsciously reveal, beneath the time-honoured poetic forms, a singer of a younger day; and this has actually happened in Hebrew poetry. More especially does this unconscious change take place where intercourse with other countries has introduced foreign words or idioms, or where a common dialect is gradually linking together men of different tongues, in a sort of *lingua franca*, that does not professedly concern itself with literary standards, but is useful for a score of official and business and everyday purposes.

Such a *lingua franca* is to be found in the Aramaic dialect. We know from the New Testament how Aramaic gradually became the spoken language of Palestine, finally ousting the pure Hebrew, which Isaiah calls "the language of Canaan" (19, 18), and the younger prophet Zephaniah "a pure language" (3, 9).

As time went on, even poetry could not wholly withstand the rising tide of Aramaisms, and scholars tell us that in some of the Psalms, and more especially in the last Book of the Psalter (*e.g.*, Pss. 103, 139), there are grammatical

forms and scattered words that do not belong to classical Hebrew, but to the younger dialect. For example, one such word, vaguely translated "stringed instruments," is included in that long list of the musical instruments employed in the services of the restored Temple (150, 4), and a recent writer¹ on Hebrew music tells us that this particular name is "a loan word from the Aramaic." And here we may pause to observe that these various musical instruments are among the many clues that help scholars to determine the period to which a given Psalm belongs. Some of them, the harp, for example, and the timbrel, and the trumpet, are found at all stages of the history, but there is a special kind of trumpet, long and straight, used purely for religious purposes, which is mentioned once only in the Psalms (98, 6), and in such other Books of the Bible as are of comparatively late date (*e.g.*, Chronicles), while the rest of the Psalms and the earlier history-books use the popular word. This seems a very trifling matter, but if we draw an illustration from "Hymns Ancient and Modern" we shall see its significance.

Such a verse as the following furnishes us with no very exact clue to its date:

"Loud organs his glory
Forth tell in deep tone,
And sweet harp the story
Of what he hath done."

But suppose that the next verse reads thus:—

"O praise ye the Lord
All things that have sound,
And let the loud megaphone
Echo around,"

we should say unhesitatingly that it had been composed in the twentieth century, or else altered then. Again, it some-

¹ Oesterley.

times happens that the use of one particular word in a poem will date it with remarkable exactness. If we were to find in our Hymn-Books such a couplet as this—

“Boycott the bad man all thy days,
And ever walk in Wisdom’s ways,”

we should say, and rightly, that it was either written or adapted after the year 1880, when the word “boycott” first came into use through the troubles of a certain Irish landlord of that name, but most certainly not before. Now, some such clue to the date of one of the Psalms appears to be afforded by the use of the word *synagogue*: “They have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land” (74, 8). Synagogues are associated in our mind with New Testament times. At the earliest, they belong to the days of Israel’s exile and dispersion. The need for synagogues was not felt so long as all Jewish worshippers were within measurable distance of the centre of all that made worship most precious to them, and so we jump to the conclusion that this Psalm must needs be of late date. But words are to the hasty and unwary like will-o’-the-wisps, and we must beware of building a theory upon one single word until we know a good deal of its history! And first of all we must remember that the word “synagogue” is an English word, borrowed from the Greek, and not a Hebrew word at all, but just the equivalent chosen by the sixteenth-century translators of the Geneva Bible to represent the Hebrew original. Now, that Hebrew word, we are told, has two meanings. It serves both for *the place where God meets his people* (as in the Temple), or for *the times when God meets his people* (as at the holy feasts). The context of our English translation favours the meaning of *place*. “They have burnt up all the houses of God in the land,” says the Prayer-Book. The Greek translators, however, favoured the mean-

ing of *time*, for they translated the verse quite differently, not using their own word "synagogue" at all, but saying: "Thus have they caused *the feasts of the Lord to cease* out of the land"—a phrase which may be compared with Hosea's prophecy of the time of Visitation, when all the mirth and the feasts, the new moons and the sabbaths, and the solemn assemblies, should cease out of Jerusalem (2, 11). The first half of this 74th Psalm reads like the literal fulfilment of Hosea's words that came to pass in the siege and capture of Jerusalem. To this chapter of the national history, and not to the subsequent days of the Exile, the Psalm seems naturally to belong, and if this be so, our English translation "synagogue" is a purely misleading rendering.

Second Test: Historical Allusions.—It is obvious that all questions as to evidences of date drawn from the original language of the Psalms lie wholly outside the scope of those of us who read our Old Testament in translations only, and that the results of criticism must be accepted or rejected at second-hand, on the authority of experts. But when we come to consider the evidences as to date afforded by historical and geographical allusions, we feel ourselves in some small degree capable, at least, of following the different arguments advanced—perhaps even of making bold to frame theories of our own! It is a wonderfully fascinating form of research, but the very slightest pursuit of it suffices to show us how many are the unsuspected pitfalls, and how baffling, upon a closer study, are many of the problems that at first sight appear so easy!

Some points, indeed, are fairly indisputable. Such a Psalm as "By the waters of Babylon" (137), whether written in captivity or afterwards, must unquestionably have the experiences of exile underlying it, and the same may be said of those twin Psalms of remembrance and longing (42 and

43), "Like as the hart." On the other hand, Psalms, like the 96th, that summon the worshippers to "bring an offering, and come into God's courts," must imply a time when the Temple was standing and the sacrifices being offered. Further, we should naturally assume that Psalms making mention of the King, praying for his welfare (20, 21) and celebrating his exploits (45, 110) belong to the period of the Monarchy; but here we are checked by the remembrance that poetry tends to run in accustomed moulds, and that possibly the great conception of Melchizedek, the priest-king, is not a portrait from the life, but just a poet's ideal of a God-crowned ruler of men (cp. 2 Sam. 23, 3-5).

But is it, we ask, impossible to get closer indications of date and circumstances than such very general ones as these? Some thirty or forty years ago cautious scholars were beginning to look forward to fresh investigations in different directions that might "tend to reduce these somewhat wide limits,"¹ and the present century has seen many advances along these different lines, with considerable results. An American student² of the Psalms, who devoted forty years to this task, by carefully weighing minutiae of language, historical data, and relation of the Psalms to other literature—all our three tests, in fact—succeeded in drawing up a chronological chart, on which every Psalm is assigned to one of ten periods, from David to the Maccabean rising. Many of this writer's conclusions are challenged, and he himself felt that some of them were more or less conjectural; nevertheless, his book marks a memorable stage in the investigation of the growth of the Psalter.

This whole matter of the evidence as to date afforded by the historical allusions in the Psalms can best be understood by studying one or two simple examples. But first of all

¹ Driver, *Lit. of O.T.*

² Briggs.

we must bear in mind that the number of Psalms that can be submitted to this second test is comparatively small—smaller than we perhaps suppose. Our familiarity with the Bible “titles” predisposes us to read into certain Psalms an historic background which we should never have discovered for ourselves without the annotators’ suggestions connecting them with particular circumstances in the life of David (*e.g.*, 59 and 142),¹ but the historic value of such traditions must be clearly established before they can be accepted as throwing light upon the occasion that called forth the poem.

Further, we must carefully distinguish between two classes of “historical” Psalms: (1) Those that appear to deal with the events of the writer’s own time and experience (*e.g.*, 42 and 137); (2) those that retell in new form the national stories of the days of old—“the things that our fathers have told us” (44, 1). Such, for example, are those noble summaries (105, 106)—first of the deliverances of the Israelites, and then of their own grievous failure to rise to the greatness of those deliverances. So, too, with that moving appeal beginning “Give ear, O my people” (78). All these three Psalms and others of the same class deal with events and traditions centuries older than the first beginnings of the Psalter. They are, in fact, moralized versions of the narratives and songs already embodied in the national history-books, such as Exodus and Judges and Samuel, with here and there the addition of some traditional touch.² We must not, therefore, look to any such Psalms for contemporary evidence of the events they celebrate, any more

¹ On this point see further in Chapter VI.

² *E.g.*, The statement in 78, 47, that the sycamore trees of the Egyptians were destroyed by *frost* or *great* hailstones; or the claim of 105, 37, that in the Exodus there was not found “one feeble person,” which is not improbably an adaptation of words of Isaiah (5, 27).

than we should look to Shakespeare's *Henry V.* or to Drayton's famous ballad for first-hand accounts of the Battle of Agincourt.

But there are other Psalms—more especially in Books II. and III., which we spoke of as containing many *National Psalms* (see p. 46)—which do give the impression of being the work of poets who were either contemporary with the events they commemorate, or at least stood near enough to have felt their influence. For an example of such an apparently contemporary ballad we may turn to the 76th Psalm, that stirring war-song, with its impressive picture of the invading host, checked and helpless at the rebuke of the God of Jacob;¹ or for a still more undoubted instance of first-hand impressions we may turn to that description of the destruction of Jerusalem of which we have already spoken (74).

But even where the historical and geographical allusions are many and striking, it by no means follows that the date and circumstances of the Psalm can be absolutely determined. The question has often been raised, Whose is the royal marriage celebrated in the 45th Psalm, entitled, "A Song of loves?" All possible clues—such as "the daughter of Tyre," "the ivory palaces," "the stringed instruments," "the gold of Ophir," "the garments smelling of myrrh, aloes, and cassia," "the mighty one, riding on in prosperous majesty"—all these phrases, and many more, have been questioned and weighed, with the result that at least eight different monarchs have been suggested, from Solomon in the tenth century and Jehu in the ninth to Alexander Balas in the second; while the possible brides have included

¹ Modern interpreters are practically at one in connecting this Psalm with Sennacherib's campaign against Jerusalem, with its sudden and mysterious failure, and this view brings them into harmony with the marginal note of the Greek translators: "With reference to the Assyrian."

Pharaoh's daughter, Jezebel, and Athaliah ! No less striking differences of opinion are found as to the occasions of many other of the historical Psalms.

We can very often attain to a sufficiently clear conception of the general situation which they describe, but it is rarely that the precise circumstances can be certainly defined.¹

In short, the historical and geographical allusions afford less help than might be expected towards determining the date of any given Psalm, and require to be taken in conjunction with our first and third tests, the *linguistic* and the *literary*.

Of this third test we have now to speak, but the subject is so large and far-reaching that it must be treated separately.

¹ For illustrations of this point see pp. 24-26.

CHAPTER VB

QUESTIONING THE PSALMS THEMSELVES—(*continued*)

(*Relation to other Books*)

WE have spoken already of two of the tests which scholars apply to the Psalms with a view to determining their date, *Language* and *Historical Allusions*. There remains a third, which opens out regions of inexhaustible interest, but which covers so wide a field that it must be treated separately from the other two.

Third Test: Relation to Other Books of the Bible.—

In its simplest form this third test lies, more or less, within the range of everyone who studies the Psalter with a reference Bible. There is hardly a Book in either the Old or the New Testament that is not in some way or other connected with the great Hymn-Book of the Jewish Church. These hymns are largely influenced by the Histories and Law-Books and National Songs of preceding generations, and also by contemporary thought. It has been said of the Hebrew Psalms that, "Like the hymns of all peoples, they are not creative, but representative. They give back in thanksgiving, in praise, and often in prayer, the faith and hopes already contained in the minds of the community, and long cherished."¹ But the Psalms in their turn have influenced the entire line of New Testament writers, as well as the authors of the Apocryphal Books, and also some of the later Old Testament Books.

¹ A. B. Davidson in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, "Eschatology."

It is easy to see that we have in this interconnexion of the Psalms with other Books of the Bible a very valuable guide towards determining their date. When, for instance, we find a Psalm like the 31st, which in the space of three verses (11–13) introduces three most distinctive phrases of Jeremiah's; when we meet, in its English dress, Jeremiah's haunting watch-word, "Magor-missabib"—that is, "Terror on every side" (cp. Jer. 6, 25; 20, 3, 10; 46, 5; 49, 29); when we find re-echoed from the same prophet such complaints as these: "I am become a fear to mine acquaintance"; "I have heard the defaming of many"; "Terror on every side" (cp. Jer. 20, 10), we cannot doubt that the Psalmist was familiar with Jeremiah's writings, and that consequently his own poem cannot be dated earlier than the sixth century; and from this, again, it follows that although it is called in the title "A Psalm of David," we cannot accept this statement as any *proof* of Davidic authorship as against the internal evidence to the contrary.

In the above instance it has been easy to decide on which side lies "the literary obligation," as scholars say, because in the case of Jeremiah we have a clear historic background and definite dates; but when of two similar passages both occur in poetical writings—as, for example, in the Psalms and in the Book of Job—it is a far more difficult matter to decide which of the two is the original.

No poet, we may safely affirm, ever wrote enduring verse that was not moulded to some extent by the natural, the historic, and the poetic heritage into which he was born. No true poet can write, wholly untouched by the conditions and thought of his own day. The Hebrew Psalmists, above all poets, showed themselves faithful to their historic and poetic past. We need only to recall such versified histories of the Exodus, the Wilderness-wanderings, Canaan, as

we find in the 105th or the 136th Psalm; or to study in the light of the 89th and 132nd Psalms the great promises of God to David; or, indeed, to turn to any other of those many Psalms in which the abiding lessons of the past are retaught to meet present needs (*e.g.*, 77 and 78), to feel how living and powerful was the inspiration of the national history. Less obvious than this, but not less striking, is the half-unconscious repetition of phrases drawn from the immemorial words bound up with the most sacred moments of their worship. Read again the High-Priest's blessing (Numbers 6, 24-26), and then follow out through seven distinct Psalms¹ the traces of its well-remembered cadences. Or read the *Song of Moses* (Deut. 32) and try—no easy task—to keep count of all the distinct lines of thought and particular phrases scattered throughout the Psalter that take their origin from this noble Song of Thanksgiving.

But though the past, in some way or other, inevitably moulds every great poet, it can never wholly suffice him. The events, the literature, the currents of thought, the whole outlook of his own day and world, are reflected, consciously or unconsciously, in his verse. He may still use for his framework, if he so desire, the familiar legends and histories, yet in some subtle way the new spirit will betray itself. In *Paradise Lost* we can feel something of the tumults of the seventeenth century. The *Faery Queen* is coloured by the fresh worlds opened by the Elizabethan explorers. In Wordsworth's *Prelude* we catch something of the French Revolution. Tennyson's *Princess* and *In Memoriam* need no date to proclaim them of the nineteenth century. Browning witnesses in a thousand ways to all the deep questionings of accepted beliefs that were raised by the fresh discoveries of science and the writings of Darwin.

The working of some such new influences can in like

¹ 4, 6; 31, 16; 67, 1; 80, 3, 7, 19; 119, 135; 121, 3-8; 134, 3.

fashion be traced in book after book of the gradually increasing library of the Old Testament, from the early days of the Monarchy, through the long half-century of the Exile, with its imperishable lessons, and in the period of the Restoration, with all its high hopes and its hard realities. Thence on to the time when the Greek civilization surged in upon the little State; raising fresh problems, enlarging the whole Jewish conception of life, and yet only making deeper and more plainly visible the cleavage that separated from men of all other nations the "strict" Jew, zealous for the customs of his country and the law of his God.

Something of these experiences, outward and spiritual, we find focused in the verse of the different unknown poets who shared these experiences, and read and pondered the literature of their own time. To take a single and very plain illustration: Look at the duplicate passages in the beginning of the 115th Psalm and at the close of the 135th, in which scorn is poured upon the idols of the heathen, and then turn to the wonderful description in Isaiah (45) of the manufacture of idols in Babylon, and it is easy to understand that for Israelites who had watched that process, or who had only read the scathing words of the prophet, the temptation to image-worship was henceforth a thing of the past, a sheer impossibility.

Or to take a different form of trial. The problems that confronted Job — "The burden of the mystery . . . the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world" — confronted likewise the writer of the 73rd Psalm. He, no more than Job, could find satisfaction in the simpler confidence of the poet of an earlier age, that even in this life righteousness was secure of its ultimate triumph and wickedness of its proper judgment (37). In the author of the later Psalm (73), we find the same questionings of the Divine justice as in Job (cp. Job 21, 7-10 with 73, 3-7), and

even the same phrases and metaphors (cp. Job 15, 27 with 73, 7; and Job 20, 8 with 73, 20, and Job 18, 3 with 73, 22); while in that most despairing of all the Psalms, the 88th, there are likenesses that have caused some scholars to suspect a common author (cp. Job 19, 13, 14 with 88, 8, 18; Job 10, 21 with 88, 12).

This question of the relation of the Psalms to the Book of Job is a peculiarly complex one, because hitherto it has not been found possible to determine the exact date of the latter. But we can easily understand that the influence may have been mutual. Supposing, that is to say, that the author of Job lived either a century before or a century after the Exile, we may reasonably expect to find him drawing upon Psalms of an earlier period, just as we do find later Psalmists, like the author of the 73rd Psalm, apparently indebted to his great dramatic poem; while in one of Job's speeches we find him quoting, though only to "parody" it,¹ the famous question of the 8th Psalm, "What is man . . . that thou visitest him?" (cp. Job 7, 17 with 8, 4).

Over and over again we can trace in the Psalms the influence of some one or other of the prophetic writings—either by way of direct quotation or in a general broadening and spiritualizing of the outlook. It is plain to all Bible readers of the 139th Psalm, that the two verses beginning "If I ascend up into heaven . . . and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea," are related to the similar passage in Amos (cp. Amos 9, 2, 3 with 139, 8-10); but unaided we should not know which was the earlier of the two. Here, however, our first test, *the test of language*, tells us—so scholars say—that the passage in Amos belongs to a much earlier period than that of the Psalm, and must clearly, therefore, be the original.

This last example leads us on to a broad principle which

¹ "Psalm 8, 5 is no doubt parodied in Job 7, 17." Driver, *Lit. of O.T.*

will be found very helpful in our study of the growth of the Psalter. "Speaking generally," says a distinguished writer¹ on the Old Testament, "Psalms follow the Prophets," meaning thereby that the mind and teaching of the Prophets are reproduced and popularized in the verse of the Psalmists. To make this sentence clear to ourselves, we may turn to Psalms 40, 50, and 51, with their great utterances concerning the true nature of acceptable Sacrifice, and we shall see that these express in song the fundamental principles laid down by Samuel (1 Sam. 15, 22) and Hosea (6, 6) and Micah (6, 6-8), that obedience, mercy, humbleness of heart, outweigh in God's sight all imaginable wealth of external sacrifice (cp. Ps. 40, 6-8; 50, 8-14; 51, 16, 17).

A more general form of indebtedness may be illustrated by the difference in attitude of the earlier and later Psalmists towards the heathen peoples with whom they find themselves in contact. The earlier attitude is seen in the 18th Psalm, which depicts "David, the servant of the Lord," as crushing all his foes of alien race, who come cringing into his presence to offer to him a feigned obedience (18, 44, 45). How wholly unlike this is the spirit of the tiny two-verse Psalm in the latest division of the Jewish Hymn-Book (117). Here, as in the *Deus Misereatur* (67), the Gentiles are summoned to take their part, together with the Chosen People, in such a union as Isaiah foresaw when he spoke of "that day when Israel shall be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth" (Isa. 19, 24).²

Yet another source from which the Psalmists occasionally draw is the proverbial sayings of their time. One such saying meets us four times in the Old and New Testaments.³

¹ Driver.

² On this point see further in Chapter XIc., on "The Holy Catholic Church."

³ Cp. also Judith (8, 27).

"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," says the Epistle to the Hebrews (12, 5); "Happy is the man whom God correcteth," says the Book of Job (5, 17); "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord," says the Psalmist (94, 12); "Whom the Lord loveth he reproveth," says the Book of Proverbs" (3, 11); and here, in this collection of "The Words of the Wise" (cp. Eccles. 12, 11 with Prov. 22, 17), is thought to be the original form of the saying.

Nor must we omit to observe that the Psalmists are in the habit of borrowing freely from their poetic predecessors, and this practice of theirs, of interweaving earlier material, adds immensely to the other difficulties of determining the date of particular Psalms. But this difficulty is not one that is peculiar to the Psalter. It is well known to all students of anthologies, whether sacred or secular. In all ages there have been versifiers who have borrowed without acknowledgment, and often without detection, from other men's stores, and among the most conspicuous of such offenders we may reckon writers of religious verse throughout 3,000 years. Their defence, and their all-sufficient defence, is that they thought not of copyright, but purely of edification! No doubt there are literary borrowings that are sheer thefts, made deliberately, just to serve personal ends, but none the less confusing to after generations. Such, for instance, is the unscrupulous adaptation by the seventeenth-century Earl of Rochester of one of the most poetical and impassioned of Quarles's *Emblems*.¹ It is the poet's fervent cry to God—his Light, his Life, his Way, his Shepherd—no longer to hide himself from his loving, sorrowing servant. Rochester, a few years later, had the audacity, by slight omissions and additions, to adapt the lines into "An address to his Mistress," and in this pirated form it has been accepted as genuine in some editions of a well-known anthology.

¹ Book III., No. 7.

Obviously, roguery of this sort has no part either in the Psalter or in our own Hymn-Books, but in both there is much of the same confusing freedom, the same combining and modifying of older material to suit present needs.

Hebrew scholars tell us that they can often detect in the Psalms interpolations that betray themselves by some flaw in the metre, and that though some of these defects may be due to the carelessness of copyists, many of them are due to unskilful adapters, seeking to make the old words increasingly suitable to later needs.¹ Somewhat in like fashion, though with a more skilful hand, Lowell's noble lines, entitled *The Present Crisis*, made their appearance in one of our War-time hymnals, *adapted*, after seventy years, to another "Present Crisis." Selected verses have been broken up and presented in a new order; by slight omissions the original metre has been fitted to the musical setting that has been made choice of, and there emerges the fine and appropriate hymn—

"Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide."

When we speak of Psalms that have "borrowed" from other Psalms, we must not reckon in this category those which have made independent use of the same famous originals, such as the recurring phrases of the Aaronic blessing, or the Song of Moses (see *ante*, p. 59). In these cases we may suppose the familiar words to have been deliberately made use of, in the same way in which Browning builds up one of his most famous lyrics on a single line out of *King Lear*: "Childe Roland to the dark tower came."

¹ Briggs gives many examples. One such he finds in the 26th Psalm, where, by the evidence of the spoiled metre, he sees (in the opening line, and in verses 7, 9-11) an endeavour to "adapt" an early Psalm for synagogue use, by increasing the elements of prayer and praise.

Wordsworth, in like manner, begins one of his unnamed poems with the first two lines of *Samson Agonistes* :

“A little onward lend thy guiding hand,
To these dark steps a little further on.”

But Wordsworth, unlike Browning, prints his quotation in special type, and then asks the question, “What trick of memory to *my* voice hath brought this mournful iteration?”

Probably some such “trick of memory,” far more than any conscious plagiarism, accounts for many curious repetitions, both in English verse and in the Hebrew Psalms. For example, a forgotten seventeenth-century poet, one John Norris, launched the well-known line: “Like angels’ visits, short and bright.” Robert Blair, the eighteenth-century sermon-writer and versifier, reproduced it as: “Visits, like those of angels, short and *far between*”; and all that then remained for its commonly reputed nineteenth-century author, Campbell, was to better the original by the telling alliteration “*few and far between*.” Once more, if we find that the famous phrase, so completely associated with Burns, “An honest man’s the noblest work of God,” is simply a quotation from Pope’s *Essay on Man*, it surely need not surprise us to find like repetitions in the Psalms, when memory had in such large measure to supply the place of books. The examples are past enumerating, but we may instance “The sighing of the prisoner, and of those that are appointed to death” (cp. 79, 11 with 102, 20), and also the striking question that meets us, in slightly varied form, both in the earliest and in the latest divisions of the Psalter: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (8, 4 and 144, 3). Both poems alike bear the ascription *A Psalm of David*, but there can be no doubt that the 144th Psalm is a composition of much later date than the 8th. This is proved

decisively by means of our first "test," *the linguistic*. "It is full," says one scholar,¹ "of Aramaisms and late and unusual words and constructions." Moreover, we may any of us prove it to ourselves by applying our third test, and tracing out in a reference Bible the way in which its first eleven verses are penetrated with direct and indirect allusions to other Psalms. Another such "mosaic" Psalm, as we may call it, is the beautiful outpouring described in the title as "A Psalm of David" (86). It reads like the most harmonious and lovely whole, though it will be found on examination that there is scarcely a phrase from first to last that may not be matched in other Psalms or other Old Testament writings, and that its one and only distinct contribution to the wealth of the Psalter is the brief petition, "Unite my heart to fear thy name" (v. 10); or, as the Prayer-Book expands it: "Knit my heart unto thee, that I may fear thy name."

Such half-conscious dependence of one poet upon another need in no wise surprise us, but the "borrowings" of the Psalms are sometimes on a much larger scale than detached phrases woven in here and there. Most of us have long ago discovered that the seven verses that contain those unforgettable metaphors, "Moab is my wash-pot," "Upon Edom will I cast out my shoe," and the rest, occur twice over (60, 6-12 and 108, 7-13), in Psalms with wholly different beginnings and different aspirations. But perhaps not everyone has observed that the 14th and the 53rd Psalms are duplicates, distinguished by a few verbal differences, and that the short 70th Psalm, with its cry for the Divine succour in time of peril, is found almost word for word, at the close of Psalm 40 (13-17).

In all these cases we shall suspect the work, not of the author, but of some later Hymn-Book compiler, revising

¹ Briggs.

at his own discretion, changing a word here and there; perhaps combining some fragment of *prayer*, such as Psalm 70, with a song of thanksgiving and self-dedication, such as Psalm 40; altering the usage of the sacred Names, according to the custom of his school (see pp. 37, 38); weaving old and familiar words into new connexions (60 and 108); breaking up a single "alphabet"¹ poem into two separate portions (9 and 10)—in fact, fearlessly recasting old and valued material for the sake of contemporary edification. The process is a legitimate one, having respect to the purpose in view, and has been repeated, as we have already seen, by Hymn-Book editors in every generation.

If we need modern examples of "composite psalms" (like Psalm 40), we may remind ourselves that the fine morning hymn, "Christ, whose glory fills the sky," is a combination by some "editor" of two separate hymns of Charles Wesley, or rather of portions of both; while the evening hymn, "God, who madest earth and heaven," consists of a fragment by Bishop Heber and a second stanza added later by Archbishop Whately.

Perhaps it may serve to summarize and make clear the various points dwelt upon in this chapter if we imagine a present-day scholar "questioning" some one particular Psalm, in the endeavour to ascertain its date and history, and the Psalm chosen shall be the 51st.

The process might be somewhat on the following lines: First of all our scholar will weigh the evidence, the external evidence, contributed by the "title," which shows him that this Psalm has had a long literary history of its own, and has passed through several of those separate Hebrew Hymn-Books that we spoke of in connexion with the "Annotated Edition" (see Chapter IV.). It is marked *For the Chief Musician*, therefore it was in the "Precentor's Book."

¹ See pp. 112, 113.

Next it is called *A Psalm*, originally a technical term, implying Verse set to musical accompaniment. It is also inscribed "*Of David*," and was therefore among those poems associated in some distinctive way with the name of David, and possibly forming a separate collection. A glance at the Hebrew text shows our scholar that the name of "*Jehovah*" is nowhere used in this Psalm, but is replaced by the word God, *Elohim*, and this proves to him that, like other Psalms in this Second Book of the Psalter, it has passed through the hands of one particular Editor. Further, he observes that the 51st Psalm belongs to a group of Psalms—thirteen in number—which are annotated with reference to specific events in David's life (all of which annotations show close dependence upon the Books of Samuel), and that it is inscribed: *When Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba*.

Our scholar knows well, moreover, that the tradition of centuries, both among Jews and Christians, has regarded this most precious Psalm as David's confession after his fall; and now, with all this fully before his mind, he will proceed to try the Psalm itself by each of our three tests—*Language, Historical Allusions, Relation to Other Books of the Bible*, or by methods very much like these.

First Test: Language.—In the case of the 51st Psalm this first test is said to be indecisive, and to have chiefly a negative value. It contains, we are told, no marked archaisms to suggest a very early date, and is smoother and more in accordance with poetic conventions than "the last words of David" (2 Sam. 23, 1-7). On the other hand, it is pronounced free from the Aramaisms that are a mark of late date.

Second Test: Historical Allusions.—The most striking of these is the prayer: "Build thou the walls of Jerusalem" (v. 18). If this verse could be proved to be an integral

part of the original Psalm, there could, of course, be no question of Davidic authorship, but it has been very commonly argued that these concluding verses (18 and 19) are an addition of a later date. A different problem, of very ancient standing, is raised by the words: "Against thee, thee only have I sinned" (v. 4). How, it has been asked, could David thus overlook the burning wrong done to Uriah? Yet the cry is in harmony with both the spirit and the words of David's actual response to Nathan's convicting sentence (2 Sam. 12, 13), where all thought of the murdered man seems swallowed up in his awakened consciousness of the far-reaching outrage done to the Divine honour. If, on other grounds, we are persuaded that the evidence of the title is to be trusted, then this particular verse need not, in itself, shake our belief in it; but opinion is more and more tending to the belief that this 51st Psalm is one of the many which are concerned with the sins and the experiences of *the nation as a whole*, rather than with the sins and experiences of any one individual, whether David or another. It is, indeed, no new thought of our own age that the speaker in certain of the Psalms—the "I"—is to be regarded, not as individual, but as *representative* and collective. This explanation had suggested itself to early commentators, Jewish as well as Christian, and when once we have grown accustomed to the idea, we shall find how often it helps us to a clearer understanding of the Psalms. It was natural to the Hebrew genius "to speak of peoples and nations as units, in terms properly applicable only to individuals, and to personify a whole people."¹ It was natural to the Hebrew to identify himself with his nation. Thus (in the Book of Numbers) Israel is figured as a simple wayfarer, begging leave of Edom to pass through her territory: "I will only pass through on my feet" (20, 18).

¹ Driver.

So, too, in the 60th Psalm the whole nation is personified as crying out with a single voice, "Who will bring me into the strong city? Who hath led me unto Edom?" (60, 9).

There is, indeed, no dispute at all as to the general principle that some of the Psalms have a *national* meaning, rather than a personal one. But opinion is endlessly divided as to the applicability of the principle to particular Psalms, and in few cases is it more divided than as regards this 51st Psalm.

We now come to our last touchstone.

Third Test: Relation to Other Books of the Bible.

—Here, once more, a reference Bible should be carefully studied, and it will then be seen how many of the most famous verses of the Psalm can be paralleled in the writings of the Prophets.

Compare, for example, the petition for a *washing* that shall be "whiter than snow" (v. 7) with the famous passage in Isaiah (1, 16–18); or the entreaties for "a clean heart and renewed spirit" (v. 10) with Ezekiel's assurance that the people of God shall be sprinkled with clean water, and endowed with a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36, 25, 26). Mark, too, how our Psalmist prays with Jeremiah (7, 15) that he be not "cast away" from God's presence (v. 11), and again how he clings (v. 9) to the reiterated promise given in the later chapters of Isaiah: "I am he that *blotteth out* thy transgressions" (43, 25; 44, 22). Or trace out the little phrase "Joy and gladness" (v. 8). It has become so familiar in our ears that we scarcely pause over it, and yet our very familiarity with it is largely due to its sevenfold recurrence in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Elsewhere the combination is rare, and we may recall Dr. Driver's dictum, "Psalms follow the Prophets"—follow them even (though probably often unconsciously) in the very matter of words, as well as of thoughts.

The more we study this inexhaustible 51st Psalm, the stronger becomes the impression that it is the outpouring of one who had found delight in all the ritual observances of the sacred places and offerings (vv. 7, 17-19), and who had steeped himself in the writings of devout men of former days—the histories (cp. 2 Sam. 12, 13 with v. 4), the law-books (cp. Lev. 14, 3, 4 with v. 7), and the messages of successive Prophets. But above all else, he seems impregnated with the very mind and words of the latter portion of Isaiah. Of this one final instance may suffice, but it is a striking one. “Take not *thy Holy Spirit* from me,” prays the Psalmist (v. 11). But what of that? Do not these words “Holy Spirit,” so constant in our own prayers, recur continually throughout the whole Bible? They do indeed shine out in our Lord’s teaching and in that of his disciples, but it almost startles us to discover that in the Old Testament it is found in this one Psalm and in two consecutive verses of Isaiah (63, 10, 11), and nowhere else at all.

The literary evidence of the Psalm, therefore, points strongly—we may rather say unmistakably—to the writer’s acquaintance with the writings not only of Jeremiah, but also with the later chapters of Isaiah, and therefore—as all modern scholars would agree—establishes a date *after the return from Babylon*. A different kind of clue is discovered by some commentators, in the Psalmist’s declaration: “Then will I teach transgressors thy way” (v. 13). From this they argue that the Psalm may fitly be assigned to the time of Nehemiah’s restoration, when the teaching of God’s law and the rebuilding of the city walls were being carried on simultaneously, and when the offerings of the Temple services were once more to become acceptable in God’s sight, because now offered in penitence and pureness of heart (vv. 13-19). If this date could be proved, the last two verses would form a natural close to all that has gone before.

Yet one other clue as to date may be here spoken of, for the sake of its deep spiritual interest. It is held by many scholars that there is in this 51st Psalm a far deeper *consciousness of sin* than belongs either to the age of David or to the time of the Monarchy as a whole. If this be so, it would seem that in God's "Divine education of the world"¹ it was just the sojourn in Babylon that gave to the Jewish people that which, in this respect, they lacked. We are learning in these days to know more of the religion of the Babylonians, and it is being shown to us that, worshippers of many gods and false gods though they were, they had yet a very profound sense of "the importance that attaches to the removal of guilt,"² and that their ritual presupposed a searching form of self-examination, and provided formulas of most humble confession, with prayers for pardon. The lessons of Babylon were not lost upon the Hebrew captives. Henceforth they scorned and utterly renounced all false gods, while yet they recognized and assimilated the spiritual side of the religion of their captors.

General Summary.—Has this entire chapter been to some readers a source of pain? Do they feel that all these attempts to analyse the Book of Psalms is to lessen its religious value, and that it is a desecration to apply to the Sacred Writings ordinary literary canons? Do they perhaps feel that if the personal and historic connexion with David³ is to be largely eliminated from the Psalms that bear his name, and the thought of "the Nation" to be substituted, half their meaning and preciousness will be lost? Probably the War has, to some extent, lessened in most minds the force of this particular objection. The Book of Daniel has taught us anew how in times of great national stress the

¹ Archbishop Temple.

² Foakes-Jackson in *The Parting of the Roads*.

³ On this point see further in Chapter VI.

sins and the needs and the confessions of the nation and of the patriot become as one (Dan. 9, 20), and that whatever is thus spoken in the name of a God-seeking nation, searching for a forgiveness and a strength outside itself, sprang first of all from the deep inner needs of some one man. Again, there may be those who resent, as dishonouring to God, the bare suggestion that his Chosen People, "Israel his servant," may have had something to learn, even in things spiritual, from the heathen peoples around?

Undoubtedly there must needs be for many Bible students a very real pain attending the process of reconstruction, but it is surely the worst pain of all to be dimly conscious that we are wilfully shutting our minds to something that we half believe to be true, just because we are too timid, or too lazy, to examine it for ourselves. But there are others who shrink back from investigations of this sort for a far less ignoble reason—and yet a faithless one. Their special fear is lest this sifting of the human mistakes and imperfections of the Psalms may rob us of their God-inspired spiritual teaching. As to this possible danger may we not take courage in seeing how wholly contrary has been the results upon the greatest and most fearless students of the Psalter, in all ages and of all countries, from the first days of Christianity down to our own time? And should we not seek to arm ourselves, as they were armed, with humility and prayerfulness? Let us remember that these "new theories," as we are apt somewhat impatiently to call them (though they may in fact be "theories" that originated in the early centuries of Christianity and are now revived), may be true, or they may be groundless. In either case, if we are rightly equipped in the way we spoke of above, we need not be afraid to read about them and to weigh them, even though it be at the cost of considerable pain to ourselves where old associations are concerned.

On the other hand, let us no less remember that new knowledge may bring us very real and great compensations, compensations that may in the end outweigh our losses. Suppose we end our chapter by suggesting three such compensations.

1. With all the new uncertainties as to the authorship of particular Psalms, is there no added gain in the thought of the many unknown singers of differing ages and wholly differing experiences, each one contributing his separate part to the great Hymn-Book of the universal Church ?

2. If we have felt that the substitution of "the Nation" for some one suffering fellow-man, pouring out his secret soul to his God, makes any particular Psalm less real and near to us, is there no compensation in the knowledge that the most sacred experiences of nameless individuals raised the standard of repentance and holiness for an entire nation, and became accepted as its very ideal of holiness ?

3. Once again, shall we shrink back in a spirit of unworthy jealousy if we find that these very Hebrew Psalmists to whom we owe so unspeakable a debt, these men of God's own possession, themselves owed a step in their religious advance to the heathen people by whom they were surrounded in their captivity ? Or shall we rather look upon it with wondering thankfulness, as a part of the "manifold wisdom of God," causing all things to work together towards the fulfilment of his eternal purpose ?

CHAPTER VI

DAVID AND THE PSALTER

THE last two chapters should in some measure have prepared the way for a clearer understanding of the problem of David's part in the Psalter. The chapter called *The Annotated Edition* (IV.) brought together some of the external evidence that links the Poet-King with the history of the entire collection. The two chapters called *Questioning the Psalms Themselves* (VA. and VB.) deal with the internal evidence for particular Psalms.

Disappointingly little, however, proves to be established by either means as to the point of authorship, although the evidence of *The Annotated Psalter* brings out very unmistakably that the strongest individual influence upon the whole Book of Psalms is that of David the King—whether as author or inspirer or subject of the various poems contained in it.

So deeply rooted was this belief in David's direct part in the Psalter that we find no less than six separate Psalms ascribed to him by our Lord or by the Apostles in such words as these: "David himself saith" (Luke 20, 42); "By the mouth of our father David" (Acts 4, 25). A generation later we find an unknown writer quoting from a Psalm (95), anonymous in the Hebrew, but in the Greek (whence he doubtless derived it) ascribed to David, and introducing his quotation with the phrase: "As it saith *in David*" (Heb. 4, 7), and using this as a recognized equivalent for St. Luke's more exact phrases: "It is written *in the*

Book of Psalms"; or, "As it is written in the second Psalm" (Acts 1, 20; 13, 33).

For more than 2,000 years, then, both Jews and Christians held this belief in the Davidic authorship of the Psalms, and Christian writers, with rare and slight exceptions,¹ supported their belief by the sacred authority of words spoken by our Lord himself, with special reference to the 110th Psalm.

It would be out of place here to attempt even to outline the controversy that has arisen round this "Psalm of David," as the title designates it. In the last half-century almost every period, from the reign of David to the reign of the Maccabean princes, has been suggested. Our "three tests" have been applied with the greatest care, but the results have been inconclusive. Still, there are few Biblical scholars of the present generation who would be prepared to uphold the Davidic authorship. This question of the date of the Psalm has become a veritable battlefield, except for those who hold that the point has been decided once and for all by our Lord's words: "David himself saith in the Holy Spirit." No statement could be more definite, and the slightly varying form in which the words appear in the first three Gospels only strengthens its general purport (Matt. 22, 41-45; Mark 12, 35-37; Luke 20, 41-44). There can be no doubt at all that our Lord was here assuming the Davidic authorship. But surely there is no irreverence in supposing that in thus speaking our Master is simply accepting the traditional belief of his age? Surely he is wholly concerned with the appeal that, through the medium of the familiar verse, he is making to the thought and understanding of his hearers, and not at all with the question of the authorship of the Psalm? He is not going beyond the

¹ *E.g.*, Theodore of Mopsuestia and others of the same school of thought, at Antioch in the third century, and later Calvin, Casaubon, and a few others.

learning of his own day, the learning in which he had been brought up, any more than when he speaks of God "making his *sun to rise*."

It may be that if we ponder this whole passage more deeply, we shall be brought to feel how our Lord's acceptance of the imperfect human knowledge of his time and upbringing was just one of the limitations to which he voluntarily submitted, when, as St. Paul says, "He emptied himself" (Phil. 2, 5); and thus we shall discover afresh that an earnest study of the Psalms leads us straight into the very heart of Christianity.

We are brought face to face, therefore, with the plain fact, that up to about the middle of the nineteenth century the belief in the Davidic authorship was practically undisputed, while in our own time controversy has raged hotly around the whole subject, to the sore distress and unsettling of many minds, and without any prospect of reaching ultimate certainty. Already, however, there are many signs that the conflict is growing less bitter, and that a considerable measure of general agreement, in principle if not in detail, has been arrived at.

Furthermore, it is well to remind ourselves that if modern criticism has sometimes shown an unwise contempt of traditional beliefs, "traditional belief," on the other hand, has not seldom claimed far more than the earliest literary statements justified. For instance, while it is more than likely that we have in past times read too emphatic a statement of authorship into the phrase found in so many of the titles "A Psalm of David," it is quite certain that when we prefixed to our Prayer-Book version the words "The Psalms of David" we were letting tradition carry us far beyond the non-committal statement of the Hebrew Scriptures: "The Book of Psalms." We were, in fact, admitting a fresh "conjectural annotation." And let us bravely face a yet

harder truth, and admit that we cannot, with the means at our disposal, say with absolute certainty of any single Psalm, "This at least has King David for its author"; or, "This one at any rate comes to us from Moses"; for whatever the probabilities of the ascriptions, they do not admit of actual proof. On the other hand, we must just as much beware of parting too lightly with the traditional beliefs of ages, or of supposing that nothing is to be accepted that is not capable of absolute proof.

We shall feel it impossible that David should have become so inseparably bound up with the psalmody of his nation, should so have overshadowed all other singers of his race and tongue, unless in his lifetime he had stood forth conspicuously as a poet. And for this belief we do find abundant evidence. In the earliest national records we find embedded in the history an ode of victory, said to have been sung by David when the Lord delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies (2 Sam. 22, 1).¹ In these same history-books we find other more or less finished poems, the elegies over Jonathan and over Abner (2 Sam. 1 and 3), besides that strange broken utterance that is headed "The last words of David . . . the sweet Psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23).¹ But even more important as evidence than these actual poems is the unconscious poetry of many of David's recorded words in certain great moments of his life—such as the tender farewell to his little dead child (2 Sam. 12), the passionate outburst of grief over Absalom's death (2 Sam. 18), the appeal to Ittai (2 Sam. 15). These passages, and many besides, show us his sensitive poet's nature on its manward side. His self-abasing thanksgiving for God's condescending mercies and unchanging truth (2 Sam. 7) shows us the

¹ Some critics, however, hold that these closing chapters of 2 Samuel are an appendix of a later date than the body of the work, and therefore less trustworthy as evidence than the rest of the book.

same poetic nature on its Godward side. In harmony, too, with what we know of David's generous, humble nature is that noble outburst of thanksgiving and oblation ascribed to him in the Books of Chronicles (2 Chron. 29); while a still later writer seems to sum up for us all the best-loved traditions of the poet-King when he says: "In every work of his he gave thanks to the Holy One Most High with words of glory; with his whole heart he sang praise and loved him that made him" (Ecclus. 47, 8).

No sober Biblical critic denies the continuity or the reasonableness of the unbroken Jewish belief that "David the son of Jesse" was a singer of sacred songs. The point at issue among modern scholars is a much smaller matter, relating to the number of these songs which may on literary or historic grounds be rightly attributed to him. Here opinions differ widely, some critics limiting their list to seven or eight, others admitting a far larger number, but none of them seeing their way to accept all the seventy-four Psalms which bear in the titles of our English Bibles the words—"of David."

Could we but accept undoubtingly the statement of these ancient marginal notes we should find ourselves in no uncertainty as to the circumstances which called forth at least thirteen of the number, for they are described with much minuteness. Take, for example, the 54th Psalm, thus carefully annotated: "Of David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?" Or to take a far better known example, we have the 51st Psalm with the introductory note: "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." There are several other Psalms of this class, annotated with a like fulness of detail, as of contemporary knowledge, but it has been observed that each one of these notes is drawn from the Books of Samuel,

and may be nothing more than the conjectures of a pains-taking Jewish editor, seeking—as so many Bible students since his day have also sought—to picture forth David's stormy life in words believed to be his own.

We must never let ourselves forget that these annotations, interesting and in many ways most valuable as they are, form no part of the original poems, and, again, we must keep in mind that in dealing with works so ancient, we have none of the help afforded by the evidence of manuscripts and signatures and autographs. Not long ago the unsigned manuscript of a sonnet by a well-known nineteenth-century poet was offered to the British Museum, but with some hesitation, on the ground that “the lines bore no signature.” The reply was that this lack was of small importance, since the poem was abundantly authenticated in other ways, and that, after all, a poet's manuscript of his own verses does not generally have the author's signature appended. But in the case of the Psalms we cannot say that the authorship is in any single case so strongly “authenticated” as to be beyond dispute. Therefore, while scholars weigh very carefully these editorial notes, and try to ascertain the full value of the traditions that may lie behind them, they are always reminding us that the final court of appeal stands, not on the external evidence of early commentators, but on what the Psalms tell us about themselves (see Chapters VA. and VB.), and whether they contain anything that either supports or contradicts the traditional statements handed down by previous editors.

It may be that to some readers all this line of argument is very unsatisfactory, and that some among us may feel a sense of disappointment—almost of injury—in realizing how little is actually known as to the authorship of the Psalms. Perhaps we feel that we have been robbed of a very precious belief if we can no longer hold with certainty

that it was David who gave us the 23rd Psalm or the 51st; and perhaps we wish that we could shut our minds to new knowledge that seems only to hurt and unsettle them. But if the new knowledge is based on truth we need, surely, not be afraid to open our minds to receive it and to learn from it, and it may be that in time we shall find many compensations for this special pain.

Let us consider just one such compensation that springs from the growth of the new belief that King David's direct part in the Book of Psalms is far less than generations of Bible-readers have supposed, and that on the other hand this great universal Hymn-Book of the people of God is the gradual work of many unnamed and unknown writers, distributed through some seven or more centuries, and yet bound together by a common language, a common nationality, a common faith.

Clearly there is no inherent impossibility, or even improbability, that one man—let us say David himself—should have written, as the marginal notes seem to suggest, half the Psalter; but experience has proved over and over again that where the quantity of sacred lyrics from a single pen is very large, it is only a comparatively small portion that holds its place in the ranks of poetry, or that even holds its place as a help to devotion. Charles Wesley, for example, stands conspicuously high among English hymn-writers, and the first issue of Wesley's famous Hymn-Book was virtually his sole work. Of this collection of over five hundred hymns by a single author it would be neither an untrue nor an uncharitable estimate to allow that perhaps thirty of them are still known to the majority of English hymn-singers. Indeed, the insufficiency of the "one-man hymn-book" must have been early borne in upon the brothers, for an "authorized supplement" containing verses from many different hands was not long in making

its appearance, to the great enrichment of the Hymnal; and since then further additions have been made at intervals.

The truth seems to be that however deep a thinker or sweet a singer any given poet may be, the men of each generation long to hear the needs and aspirations of their own time set forth anew—"everyone in his own language, wherein he was born." We know it by ourselves. We are not unmindful of our own great patriotic poets, of Shakespeare and Milton and Wordsworth—rather we go back to them the more in times of crisis. But they cannot wholly suffice us, for we need also poets who have passed through our own special experiences, and who can in some measure draw out and express for us something of the underlying purpose of all these new and hard lessons. This is largely the explanation of the immense outburst of poetry—the larger part of it by young and wholly unknown writers—that has marked the course of the War. We have "new needs and new helps to these." The help that our contemporaries bring may perhaps fall below the standard of the older help of which we are already possessed, but even so there must be "new help" of some sort to serve the "new need." And thus we find it in the long history of the Book of Psalms. The men of Jeremiah's day, with captivity and exile overhanging them, could not be completely satisfied with the poetry that had sprung from days of conquest and prosperity. "The Promised Land"—nay even this whole earth—was becoming too strait for men who were burdened with the growing consciousness of the limitations and the wrongs of this present life, and who were dimly feeling after something ampler and more divine to satisfy their thirst. The years in Babylon wrought upon them their own changes, not only in the externals of civilization but in a deepening of thought and a heightening of ideals (see pp. 72, 73); and of all these diverse influences, the

lesser as well as the larger, telling now upon the external life of the Chosen People, now upon their intellectual and spiritual life, we can more or less catch the inspiration in the different Psalms. The particular Psalmists still remain unknown to us, but we can distinguish their voices, and we are learning to piece together something of the varying worlds in which they lived.

CHAPTER VII

THE RELIGIOUS TEMPER OF THE PSALMS

THE Psalter is not only the Hymn-Book of the Church; to a very large extent it is also its Prayer-Book. We all know how largely the Psalms have been drawn upon in our daily and occasional services, and how they put into our mouths those lovely ejaculations for cleansing, for safety, for spiritual health—those arrows of Prayer—that can never lose their hold on our memories. Truly, we find in the Jewish Psalms words for all our deepest and highest needs—prayers and aspirations that might have sprung from the New Testament. Yet often in reading and reciting them we are conscious (as we said in the opening chapter on *The War and the Psalter*) of a sort of moral shock, and this occurs, not in one or two Psalms only, but in verses that are embedded in some of the loveliest of them (*e.g.*, 69, 22-28; 109, 6-15; 137, 7-9). There we meet not only the conviction that the cruel evil-doer will be justly punished by a righteous Judge, but fervent prayers that evil may pursue all his belongings. Or again, we are perhaps repelled by what seems to us the self-approving tone of other Psalms (*e.g.*, 101, 2; 119, 51, 78, 139), and the unhesitating assumption of the right to pass judgment on others, as from a higher platform.

And yet the experience of nineteen centuries of Christianity has proved abundantly that the prayers and praises of the Jewish Psalter are most divinely fitted to inspire and sustain the devotions of Christendom.

We must set ourselves, therefore, to examine more deeply into the whole question, bearing in mind that our chief difficulty arises from the twofold aspect presented by many of the Psalms:

1. The closeness of the writers' communion with God.
2. The vindictive spirit often displayed towards their fellow-men.

The contrast is as sharp and as painful as that brought forward by S. James—"Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing." And our own sense of the lack of fitness in such a contrast is met by S. James's stern word of condemnation: "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (cp. Jas. 3, 8-10).

Very many expedients have been suggested as helps towards finding edification in using these so-called *minatory* or *deprecatory* portions of the Psalms, in which such burning vengeance is sought from God for the punishment of the enemy—not in worldly welfare only, but in spiritual also: "Let them not come into thy righteousness" (69, 27); "Let his prayer be turned into sin" (109, 7). And it is a vengeance that would extend beyond the evil-doer himself to his wife and children: "Let his wife be a widow; his children vagabonds" (109, 9, 10); while so blinded with anger is another of the Psalmists that he even dares to beseech him whom he invokes as "the God of my mercy," not only to grant him his desired victory, but beseeches this same God to be "*not merciful* to any wicked transgressors" (59, 10, 5).

Some people tell us that in reading such passages as these we must call to our aid the power of allegorizing. We are bidden to shut out the shocking idea of such horrible "prayers" as being directed against actual men and women, and to translate all the vehemence of the Psalmist into a struggle with sin in the abstract, and thence learn to admire

and to imitate the zeal that will yield no sort of quarter to evil in any shape whatever. We may perhaps find it possible so to apply more general words, such as: "Of thy goodness slay mine enemies, and destroy all them that vex my soul" (143, 12, P.B.V.), and to treat them as a prayer for deliverance from our besetting sins, but to most of us such allegorizing would be purely unreal; while, "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock" (137, 9) is too concrete a statement to be translated into a mere injunction to wage merciless war against spiritual wickedness.

Others find a measure of relief in the view that the "enemies" in question are no private and personal enemies, but national foes, the foes of God's Chosen People; therefore the foes of God himself, and so legitimately to be "hated with a perfect hatred" (139, 21, 22). We readily recognize the distinction; perhaps we sympathize with it as justifying the natural impulses that a long experience of war inevitably arouse. Yet we know in our hearts that neither can this explanation satisfy us.

Other commentators suggest a more general and historical treatment of the whole difficulty. "Let us," they would say, "lay aside all thought of *edification* in such passages as these, and remember that we are using the words of men of an age far removed from our own, belonging to a primitive state of society, who expressed their inmost selves, both bad and good, with absolute directness." This point of view may satisfy our intellect, but it can never bring general relief, for it can be applied only by those who have some measure of education.

Other explanations have been offered, but the only complete and really satisfying answer seems to be the very simple one that the Jewish Psalmists were not Christian hymn-writers, and that the highest teaching of forgiveness

and the all-perfect example of Love had not yet been manifested.

Nevertheless, the difficulty, or at the least the sense of the lack of harmony with the rest of our worship, does make itself insistently felt, and will always be a stumbling-block to a large proportion of hearers and readers, so long as the entire Psalter continues to be recited in our Sunday and week-day services. It is said that in the services of the Roman Catholic Church only about fifty Psalms are made use of; in the Jewish synagogues, in the various general and special services, over seventy are drawn upon. The English Prayer-Book, more than three centuries ago, substituted her steady *monthly* reading of the entire Psalter (subject to interruption only upon six specified days in the whole year) for the nominal weekly recitation that had grown up with the observance of the monastic hours. The American Prayer-Book accepted our existing arrangement, but supplemented it with a table of selected Psalms from which choice might be made at discretion. Something of the same sort is about to be experimentally tried in the Church of England and the advantages of a certain freedom of selection are obvious, and yet it is certain that from any narrowing in our prescribed use of the Psalter we shall experience loss as well as gain. Many people are apt to ignore altogether those parts of Scripture that are not made use of in the public services, and we shall lose a great deal if we lose our familiarity with certain Psalms because they have not reached the full height of Christianity. If we were to reject the whole of such Psalms as the 69th, the 109th, and the 137th, we should in so doing lose much that is very precious and beautiful; and the present proposal is to omit certain verses, and in one or two instances to omit a whole Psalm.¹ It is very easy to exaggerate the quantity of

¹ *E.g.*, Ps. 58 and one or two others, that occur practically in duplicate.

the minatory portions of the Psalms, just because each time we meet them they jar us afresh. Let us look at four of these Psalms. The 58th is one of those that would disappear altogether from general use, and rightly so, for its cruel words have no place in public worship, and yet—not a few worshippers must have been led to ponder the solemn question with which it opens and the note of confidence in God's justice on which it closes. The same unshaken conviction of an ultimate manifestation of that justice is the true keynote of the 109th Psalm, but it is obscured by a storm of human passions. At one moment the writer seems to be merely stating the inevitable laws of the spiritual world: "He loved cursing, and it came to him: He delighted not in blessing, and it was far from him" (109, 17). Then his resentment of the wrongs inflicted by his cruel enemy make him impatient to hasten and increase that certain punishment which must overtake him, extending it even to the innocent wife and children (vv. 6–12). Finally a gentler note is struck, and he seeks mercy for himself, though not for his enemy—the unfailing mercy which is part of the Divine nature (vv. 21, 22). In the case of this Psalm it is proposed to omit all the verses from 5 to 20 (R.V.). The 69th Psalm holds the same perplexing contrasts as the 109th, though on a smaller scale. Yet, if we remember how closely it has been studied by our Lord and his followers, we shall not lightly pass it by without seeking for a deeper understanding of its lessons. Convocation proposes to omit from public recitation verses 22–28 (R.V.). Lastly, we come to a somewhat different example. "By the waters of Babylon" (137) must always hold a very special place of its own, for the sake both of its poetry and its historical associations; but all Church-goers would be glad to be relieved from the last three verses, with their savage hatred, and to end with the ardent expression of loyalty to Jerusalem (v. 6).

It is a wonderful and wholly unconscious tribute to the high spiritual level of the Jewish Psalter that we are always instinctively judging the whole Book by Christian standards, and feeling surprised and disappointed whenever it falls short of them; but if we think the whole matter out, are we prepared to say that human anger—*righteous* anger against cruelty and wrong—has no place in God's service? The Psalms would not have been the power for good in the world that they have been without their natural vehemence against injustice and cruelty.

But to many minds the chief stumbling-block of the Psalms lies not in their active hatred of evil and evil-doers. It is far more what seems to them to be the attitude of religious self-approval, the Pharisaic looking down upon others, that they think they detect in such verses as these: "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way"; "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart" (101, 2). Or these other pronouncements: "I will not sit with the wicked" (26, 5); "I will know no evil person" (101, 4 mg.). "What living soul," we are ready to ask, "is so free from self-blame that he should dare thus to condemn his fellows and to speak thus confidently of himself?" In the first place, part of our difficulty will be greatly diminished if we bear in mind that the word "perfect" no longer bears quite so large a sense as formerly. Our use tends to narrow it to "that which has reached a point beyond the possibility of improvement." The Psalmists do not lose sight of this high ideal of "completeness," but they extend it to *completeness of aim*, instead of limiting it to completeness of *achievement*. With them it has much the same meaning as "sincere," "honest-minded," "upright." Where the Prayer-Book translates "I have walked *innocently*" (26, 1), the R.V. reads "in mine *integrity*." This keeps the idea of completeness and wholeness of purpose, but it misses the inspiration of the

word "perfect" (used in 101, 2), which helps us to connect man's purest effort after right with God's *perfect law* (19, 7), and with God's own *perfect way* (18, 30).

Perhaps we still feel in some of the utterances of the 119th Psalm a certain spirit of over-confidence (*e.g.*, vv. 100, 115). Do we think that the lowest beginnings of Christian humility would keep us from such utterances? But no Psalmist ever safeguards his resolution with one feeble phrase: "I will try!" Moreover, we are again judging the Jewish Psalter by the Christian standard, and in so doing we are shutting our eyes to the great lesson of God's education of the world. Let us bear in mind that the writers of the Psalms and their earliest readers were surrounded by heathen peoples, and were constantly exposed to the temptation of sinking to their lower standard of good. These men had known what it meant "to mingle themselves with the nations, and to learn their works" (106, 35).

In many respects the Psalms seem to us to spring from a race of spiritual giants; yet it is no less true that they spring from a time of spiritual childhood; when the Chosen People was still fighting its way to higher things, without the measure of protection wherewith the proud patriotism and the separatist spirit of the later Judaism was afterwards to hedge round its beliefs and to stiffen its faith. And the stress of this effort to keep themselves untouched by the surrounding evils often shows itself in the fierce intolerance of the most pious-minded of the nation, for those who tempted them to lower levels. Undoubtedly. But then, is *tolerance* the first and highest of virtues? Or is it not noted as a mark of the thoroughly bad man that "he abhorreth not evil" (36, 4). Should we desire to find "tolerance" as the chief characteristic of a young, unformed school-boy, or should we not rather desire to see him forearmed with very clear distinc-

tions between right and wrong, and ready, if need be, to defend them with considerable vehemence? It may be truly objected, however, that none of these pleas justify such a direct invoking of evil upon even the innocent family of the wrong-doer as we find in the 109th Psalm. Of course it does not, and we need not attempt to justify it; but at the same time it is only fair to remember that all these cruel imprecations—and even such a verse as: “Let them be blotted out of the book of life” (69, 28)—have reference to the region of the earthly life only. It was only by slow degrees that the hope of immortality became a part of the Jewish faith,¹ and in this terrible “prayer” of the 69th Psalm there is no thought at all of a life beyond the grave. It is rather an honest, passionate wish to see the whole atmosphere cleansed by the expulsion of the offender, root and branch—and perhaps some of us might ask ourselves whether in this respect we are wholly free from the hasty temper of the Psalmist, or whether we have ever rejoiced over the riddance from our parish of some specially undesirable neighbour, without much concerning ourselves as to the consequences to his family, or to his own spiritual state!

We can now see, it may be, that this sharp cleavage between good and evil—this temper, which Dean Stanley somewhere describes as “the noble intolerance of the 101st Psalm,” is a shield both to young persons and to young nations, and therefore makes for good. But what of the “self-approving” tone, that most of all jars upon our modern sensitiveness? That also is a part of the protective armour of the immature. A wholly unattainable ideal does not tend to progress, for it does not furnish a sufficiently strong motive power; but if a man can honestly say, with the old Hebrew Psalmist, that he has never done a treacherous ill “to him that was at peace with me,” he will be better

¹ On all this point see further in Chapter XIc.

prepared for the next step when it arises: "Yea, I have delivered him that without cause was my adversary" (7, 4), and he will not then find it hard to attain to the spirit of active love that causes yet another Psalmist to fast and pray on behalf of his unscrupulous enemies in their hour of need, and to feel their sorrows as though they were his own (35, 11-14). The higher we climb, the more our ideals rise; they are, as we well know, for ever receding, and yet we shall be agreed that the Psalmist who thus puts himself into his enemy's place has leapt on far towards the Christian ideal. He has met, *and satisfied*, what S. Peter calls "the appeal of a good conscience towards God" (1 Pet. 3, 21 mg.). S. Paul makes the like appeal in his defence before Felix (Acts 24, 16); so does the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (13, 18). What the Jewish Psalmists claim in the private outpourings of their verse, these Christian teachers do not shrink from asserting before their fellow-men, as though they would fain remind us that conscience is a monitor of good, no less than of evil.

But does this mean that the Psalms are lacking in a sense of the exceeding sinfulness of human sin (cp. Rom. 7, 13), as beheld against the unchanging background of the perfect holiness of God? The question is answered as soon as it is asked.

If in repeating some few verses of the Psalms we are some of us inclined to be silent, rather than take upon our lips words of hatred that we know to be below the level to which centuries of Christian teaching has raised ourselves, how much oftener might not many of us be dumb for the very contrary reason—from a shamed conviction that, Christians though we be, we are not worthy to make our own such cries of penitence and self-abasement, such fervent professions of passionate allegiance to our God, as we find in these Jewish hymns!

Can penitence towards God find deeper expression than in the *Miserere* (51) or in the *De profundis* (130)? Can the longing for communion with God go beyond the cry, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (73, 25)? Again and again in the Psalms we are met by this insatiable thirst for the Divine Presence (*e.g.*, 42, 2; 63, 1), a thirst that can be "satisfied" only as it gradually draws nearer, in some half-understood fashion, to the sight of the Divine likeness (17, 15).

Or we may, if we will, try ourselves by the standard of the Psalmist's zeal against action which dishonours God, and accounts all such actions and words as a personal injury and those who are guilty of them as having wronged himself (139, 20-22). Or again, we may find a rebuke to our lack of endurance, our coldness in worship, in the experiences of those pilgrim souls who find blessings even in "the valley of weeping," and a glory in the lowliest offices in the house of their God (84, 6, 10). Or do we seek yet one more touchstone to convince us as to the sufficiency of the Hebrew Psalter as a handbook for Christians? We shall find it in that long 119th Psalm, which has been so fitly and beautifully summed up as "The Psalm of the Dedicated Life."¹ Until we can claim that, in spite of all human frailties and backslidings, we have the writer's pure delight in God's word and God's will; until we have learned from him to turn all ills to good (vv. 67, 71, 75); until there is in our lives the same utter singleness of purpose that gives unity to all these two-and twenty stanzas—at first sight so monotonous,² yet on a closer study showing themselves so marvellously varied; until we have attained to the writer's spirit of unceasing prayer—we need not fear that we shall outgrow the ideals of even this one particular Psalm. Indeed, our difficulty in appropriating to ourselves much of the language

¹ *New Cathedral Psalter.*

² *Ibid.*

of the Psalter is not that it is inadequate to our own standards, but that it is too high for them.

While it is true that every single reader of the Psalms—those who are consciously consenting to wrong (50, 17); those who are taking their first stumbling steps in the Godward path (94, 18); and those whose eyes are ever looking unto the Lord (25, 15)—may find himself mirrored in one or other of the Psalms, and may therein recognize the ideals by which his own life is shaped, yet there remain unexhausted ideals of perfect holiness which rise above the practice of the ripest saints. It is as though such passages as these had been lying waiting through the long years until One should come to whom they should truly and fitly belong; One who should claim them, as of right. It was not until the first Easter Day that the key to the Psalms was once for all placed in the hands of the Church (Luke 24, 44).¹ Yet to us now it almost seems that even had the key not been thus clearly and authoritatively given, the Christian instinct must ere long have found its Lord in the Hebrew Psalter.

There, looking back with newly opened eyes and hearts upon the ancient words, his own disciples—and new-made disciples as well—found foreshadowed the outlines of the Divine Life that had been manifested here upon earth by One who “lived as a citizen among men.”² There, too, they could trace the lineaments of a “perfect” character (37, 37), such as had never been seen among men till they beheld the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ (cp. 2 Cor. 4, 6). “Full of grace are thy lips” (45, 3, P.B.V.) were words that belonged of right to him who spake as “never man so spake” (John 7, 46); whose “words of grace” caused all men to wonder (Luke 4, 22).

“I have kept the ways of the Lord. . . . I was also perfect with him” (18, 21, 23). This is a claim all too

¹ See Preface, pp. viii.-x.

² Creed of Eusebius.

great for the warrior David who first utters it (cp. 1 Sam. 22, 1, 22, 24). It befits the Son of David, who did "always" the things pleasing to the Father (John 8, 29). "Search me, O God, and see if there be any way of wickedness in me" (139, 23, 24), is a challenge that no man could presume to offer, save the Man in whom there was "no sin" (1 John 3, 5).

We have seen in this chapter that the Book of Psalms contains varying ideals of conduct—some lower, some higher—and in every age the lower and poorer ideals have been but too easily fulfilled. Happily, it is no less true that in every generation there have been found "friends of God" (Wis. 7, 27), who have been inspired and lifted heavenwards by the nobler ideals of the Psalter.

Yet still there remained the sense of contradiction between the perfection of the ideal and the faultiness of those who professed it. The words were still *waiting*—waiting, as it were, for One who should be worthy to take them as his own. The full harmony between the inspired words and those who spoke them could never be perfected until there was manifested upon earth One whose whole life uttered the words: "*Lo, I am come* ; in the roll of the book it is prescribed to me: I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart" (40, 7, 8).

And over and over again, as we read the Psalms, some fresh vision of our Lord is flashed upon our minds. The familiar words themselves seem to whisper to us: "This is he of whom we spake" (cp. John 1, 15, A.V.), and so we rest—satisfied at last.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MUSICAL SETTING

MUSIC and Poetry are so inextricably associated throughout the Psalter, so many technical terms are employed, the various instruments are so carefully specified, that it seems as though we ought to be able to form a tolerably clear impression of *the musical setting of the Psalms*. Musicians have followed up every clue, and have succeeded in collecting a considerable amount of information; yet on the whole the results of these researches are disappointing, for it is almost impossible in these attempts at reconstruction to arrive at distinct impressions of the music of any given period—the musical services of David's time, let us say. If we might trust the descriptions found in the First Book of Chronicles (*e.g.*, chapters 15 and 16), we should have no doubt at all that in his reign there already existed a highly elaborate musical organization, with its trained choirs, instrumental accompaniment, ordered anthems; with congregational responses and doxologies. But we must remember that the Chronicler lived some seven centuries after David, and that his pictures of the glory of David's worship in presence of the Ark must inevitably be coloured by the fuller ritual that he himself was accustomed to in the post-exilic Temple. How many of us could achieve the far easier task of describing, without falling into some anachronism, the medieval worship in one of our English cathedrals?

None the less, it is quite clear that music and singing play a very important part throughout David's whole life. The

early history-books (1 and 2 Sam.) bring into prominence, not alone David with his harp (1 Sam. 16, 16-23), but the women with their timbrels and their triangles, singing songs in his honour (1 Sam. 18, 6, 7). These same history-books record his joyous bringing of the Ark into the city, "with harps and with psalteries, and with timbrels and with castanets and with cymbals," and with "the sound of trumpet" (2 Sam. 6, 5, 15); and the earliest of the prophetic books bears witness to the popular association of King David with music, when it speaks of those who "devise for themselves instruments of music, like David" (Amos 6, 5). In the closing chapters of Nehemiah, written centuries after the book of Amos, Asaph¹ is singled out as one of David's coadjutors in things musical: "For in the days of David and Asaph of old there was a chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God" (Neh. 12, 46). This conjunction of the names is not contemporary, but it is very persistent, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that here we may trace the beginnings of one of those hereditary families of musicians—the Asaphs and the Korahites²—whose names are for all time enshrined in the Book of Psalms. And as to that anonymous "Chief Musician"³—the "Precentor," as we have called him—may he not be the fourth-century representative of a long line of such officials, tracing back their official dignity to the days when King David was said to have chosen out Asaph and Heman and the Kohathites and

¹ On *Asaph*, whose name appears in the title of about a dozen of the Psalms, see further in Chapter Xb.

² Korahites (in R.V. "Kohathites"); more familiar to us as "The Sons of Korah" of the titles of the Psalms. Known to the Temple service of the Chronicler's day both as "singers" (1 Chron. 6, 31; 2 Chron. 20, 19), and also as "door-keepers" (1 Chron. 9, 19, and 26, 19; Cp. Ps. 84, 10).

³ See pp. 34, 35, and cp. the "title" of Ps. 4 and the note at the end of Habakkuk.

others, "to set them over the service of song" (1 Chron. 6, 31, 33, 39)? In the slow-moving East genealogies are treasured and hereditary offices are long-lasting.

"The Precentor's Book" has given us all a certain familiarity with much of the musical phraseology of the Chronicler's time, and the Books of Chronicles and the Book of Psalms in this respect mutually throw light on one another. Such terms as *Alamoth* (Ps. 46) and *Sheminith* (Ps. 6 and 12), are meaningless to us, but when we have been told by Hebrew scholars that *Sheminith* means "an octave lower" and that *Alamoth* means literally "after the manner of maidens," and is, in fact, a direction to the male voices to sing in falsetto, then it is interesting to turn to the First Book of Chronicles (15, 20, 21), and to watch these old dead terms coming to life. Here we find one group of musicians with their "psalteries set to Alamoth"—that is to say, supporting the treble voices—and a second group "with their harps set to the Sheminith"—that is to say, leading the basses. By searching these two Books of Chronicles we may do much to gain very vivid impressions of the Temple music about the time of the compilation of what we have elsewhere called "The Musical Edition of the Psalter,"¹ but the Chronicles do not help us to an explanation of those puzzling Hebrew words in the titles of several of the Psalms, such as *Jonath elem rekohim* (56), or *Shushan Eduth* (60 and 80); nor do the English translations do anything to help our ignorance. "The silent dove of them that are afar off," or "The lily of testimony," is not much more intelligible to us than the strange Hebrew words. But when we learn that these are just the names of the melodies or musical "tones" to which these particular Psalms are to be sung, we are reminded of our own old-fashioned hymnals, with names of appropriate tunes (no

¹ See p. 34.

whit less unintelligible) set over against the first line—*Martyrdom, Ben Rhydding, Darwell*, and the like. If, again, we find in the Psalter that the same musical assignment, *Altashheth*—that is, “Destroy it not”—is given to no less than four Psalms (Ps. 57, 58, 59, 75),¹ we may remember how often in our Hymn-Books “Tallis’ Canon,” or some other well-established favourite, does more than double duty.

Several Psalms are furnished with refrains (*e.g.*, 80 and 107), and there are others that are plainly intended to be treated antiphonally (*e.g.*, 24, 7–10); while in such a Psalm as the 136th the grandeur of the effect depends upon the massive simplicity of the unchanging chorus: “His mercy endureth for ever.”

Towards the latter part of the Psalter we find mention of an increasing range of instruments, and it has been suggested that in the final Psalm we have an enumeration of the entire Temple orchestra. The Authorized Version here, as in three other passages (Gen. 4, 21; Job 21, 12; 30, 31), puzzles us by introducing the word “organ” (150, 4), but this can only be taken in the sense of a mouth-organ or pipe of reeds, and, indeed, both the Prayer Book and the R.V. so render it: “Praise him with the pipes,” or, “with the pipe.”

The question has been often, and somewhat vainly, discussed whether the music of the Temple worship would or would not prove pleasing in our ears. Judging by present-day vocal music in the East, the consensus of Western travellers goes to show that it would not be found acceptable. It seems agreed that the compass of Hebrew melody was very small—three or four notes, perhaps—and that the sum total of *noise* was very great. The “plaintiveness” of Eastern song appeals to some, while others pronounce

¹ Cp. the quotation in Isa. 65, 8, “Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it,” which some take to be the opening words of one of the vintage songs.

it "excruciatingly harsh," and "without harmony." According to yet another witness, however, it has two conspicuous merits. "The melodies of all Orientals," says this traveller of a century ago,¹ "are solemn and simple, and it is demanded of all singers that they sing so distinctly that every word can be understood." How far this ideal was achieved in the rendering of the Psalms in the Temple worship we cannot tell, but it is clear that it must have been a point of the first importance when "books of the words" were non-existent, and when congregations had to be constantly ready to take their part in refrain or doxology. "The Psalms," says one writer on this subject, "must have been chanted; but it is most unlikely"—so he caustically adds—"that the chants bore any resemblance to what we understand by the term. Our irrational and exceedingly artificial method of rushing over any number of syllables on a fixed note would hardly commend itself to a people to whom its sacred songs formed a living expression of their deepest feelings."²

Notwithstanding all the careful research that has been expended upon the subject of the development of music in the Old Testament, there are still many unfilled gaps in our knowledge, and what we do know is chiefly drawn from post-exilic writings, and belongs, therefore, to a period when the national music and song had been touched by successive foreign influences, from Egypt and from Babylon and from Greece.

We must beware of reading back into David's day the glories of the choral worship described by the Son of Sirach (Ecclus. 50, 16-18), and yet we must remember that "the servants of the house of the God of heaven"—the *singers*, no less than the priests and Levites—were an organized body of sufficient importance—if we may trust the Persian edict

¹ Niebuhr.

² Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, "Music."

reproduced in the Book of Ezra (7, 23, 24)—to be able to claim from Artaxerxes exemption from taxation after the Jewish people had returned out of captivity to Jerusalem. In this official document of the Persian King we have a most undesigned proof of the continuity of the musical side of Hebrew worship. Development no doubt there had been, but the link with the days of the Monarchy is strong.

That music, in some form or other, was interwoven with the whole life of the nation—personal, social, and religious—is abundantly demonstrated throughout the Old Testament, but we should be assured of it even had we only the Book of Psalms. There we find songs suited to family rejoicings (*e.g.*, 127, 128), to personal griefs (35), and to national troubles (46);¹ but it is in the Temple services that Hebrew music and song reach their high tide, for there they were associated with the ceremonial offering of the sacrifices that were the true centre of all Jewish worship.

Those joyous days on which the trumpet-sound called together the glad worshipper, and when “the pleasant harp” and the voices of the singers made “a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob,” were also “solemn feast-days” (81, 1–3), marked by the gifts brought to the altar, either as peace-offerings or thank-offerings. “*The sacrifices were the centre of the worship: the Psalms and the music the setting.*”²

This intimate association of music and song with the act of sacrifice is brought out very clearly in the Chronicler’s account of Hezekiah’s solemn revival of the Passover (2 Chron. 30, 21–24), when “the Levites and the priests praised the Lord by day, singing with loud instruments,” and the King and the Princes offered hecatombs; but the association itself is as old—and, indeed, far older—as the days of the earliest of the prophets whose writings have

¹ On this point, see *ante*, pp. 11–15.

² Oesterley.

come down to us, and in the Book of Amos we read of "the songs and the melody of viols" that accompanied the lavish sacrifices of "the burnt-offerings" and "the peace-offerings" in the "solemn assemblies" of his day (5, 21-23).

Those "marginal notes" to the Psalms, which we have spoken of elsewhere, bring further evidence to show that in the Temple services the primary use of the Psalms and of the different instruments of music was to glorify the offering of the sacrifices. We may some of us have noticed in the title of the 100th Psalm the words "A Psalm of Thanksgiving," or, as it is more exactly translated in the margin of the R.V., "A Psalm for the Thank-offering." Thus translated it suggests a rubric assigning this special Psalm to one of those gladsome occasions on which the worshipper brought his peace-offering.

In two other Psalms—not joyous Psalms like the 100th, but both of them heavily burdened by the consciousness of sin and suffering (38 and 70)—we find another sort of rubric prescribing their use in connexion with the solemn and awe-inspiring sacrifice of the burnt-offering. Here, again, the Revised Translation has made clear words that have long been a perplexity to commentators. "A Psalm to bring to remembrance," said the A.V., and many have been the guesses at the meaning of the phrase; but the Revisers' marginal rendering, "To make memorial," suggests the clue; for *to make the memorial* was the Jewish technical term for the sacrificing of the burnt-offering.

If we read the Psalms with our attention turned towards their liturgical use, we shall find more light on the subject than perhaps we expected. There is, for example, the rubric attached to the 92nd Psalm, directing its use as "A Song for the Sabbath Day." From other sources we know that anciently each one of the seven days had its "proper Psalm" assigned to it, though "the Sabbath" is the only

day so distinguished in the Hebrew Psalter. This particular choice speaks for itself, and when we join in this call to join ourselves to the worshippers of our God and to praise his "loving-kindness in the morning, his faithfulness every night" (v. 2), we may like to remember that for more than two thousand years the words have been associated with the weekly thanksgiving of the Chosen Race.

The *night* worship referred to above is no mere form of speech. We have a more distinct reference to it in the 134th Psalm: "Ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord" (vv. 1, 2); but these watching servants, standing with uplifted hands in the night—"the dark night" (as some of the ancient versions say)—are not mere chance worshippers. They are the trained choirs of the Levites, fulfilling their appointed task. The succeeding Psalm (135, cp. 115) reads like a solemn hymn, in which the nation, the priesthood, the Temple servants, are successively summoned to join in blessing the Divine Name, and finally the appeal is extended to those of other nations—the proselytes who have learned the fear of the Lord—to join in the great Hallelujah (135, 19, 20).¹

The 116th Psalm gives us a different picture, and shows us a worshipper coming with votive offerings into the Temple, there to "take" or to "lift up" before his God *the drink-offering*, "the cup of salvation" (v. 13), that is the sign of his gratitude, while he once more reiterates his pledge to "call" in the future, as he has called in the past, upon the Helper who has never yet failed him (vv. 2, 4, 13, 17).

No one of the later festal Psalms surpasses in joyous freedom the glorious outburst of praise found in the Korahite collection, and associated by Jewish usage with the Feast of Trumpets: "O clap your hands, all ye peoples; shout unto God with the voice of triumph" (47). In this Psalm our

¹ See Briggs on both these Psalms: 135, 115.

translators make us feel something of the joyous clamour of a Hebrew festival. The Revisers have, for the most part, avoided the word "shout," and substituted the paraphrase, so familiar in the *Venite* and *Jubilate* and elsewhere, "Make a joyful noise." But this fails to bring before our imaginations the tumultuous noise of the Temple festive worship, which an anonymous Jewish poet of the period of the capture of Jerusalem himself likens, as he looks back upon it, to the noise of the Chaldæan soldiery, engaged in their reckless work of plunder: "They have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn assembly" (Lam. 2, 7; cp. Ps. 74, 4). We may well be content not to disturb old associations, and to leave untouched the familiar rendering "joyful noise" of Psalms 95 and 100; but in this "Trumpet Psalm" no other word could adequately fill the place of *shout*. Even our beautiful Prayer Book Version, "God is gone up with a *merry sound*," falls short; for the imagery of the whole verse is drawn from the clapping of hands and the great shout that acclaims the presence of an earthly King (cp. 1 Sam. 10, 24), and that in like manner acclaimed the coming up of the heavenly King to his dwelling on the holy hill of Zion. The "shout" was in fact, a part of the ordered ritual.

Nor do the Psalms fail to give us a reminder of another part of the religious ritual of the feasts—those sacred *dances* in the Temple precincts (149, 3; 150, 4) that heightened the joyous excitement of the gatherings, but on this subject we shall have more to say in the next chapter, when we come to consider the curious point of the influence of these sacred dances upon the versification of the Psalms (see Chapter IX.).

It is for most of us a hard, if not an impossible, task to enter fully into the spirit of these Temple services, which contain so many elements wholly foreign to our Western habits of worship, and yet we must be dull indeed if we

wholly fail to recognize the glory and the beauty of much of this ancient ritual, or if we feel in ourselves nothing of the profound awe and reverence with which it inspired the Hebrew poets who themselves took part in these solemn acts of worship, and who have put them into words for us.

"Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" is one of those recurring phrases of the Authorized Version¹ that won for themselves a permanent place in English speech and thought (Ps. 29, 2; 96, 9; 110, 3; 1 Chron. 16, 29; cp. 2 Chron. 20, 21). Yet the phrase, beautiful though it is, fails to give us the vivid picture that is suggested by the marginal readings of the Revised Version—"Worship the Lord *in holy array*." In the 96th Psalm (as in Chronicles) the call is to the Temple ministers, clad in their sacred vestments and ornaments, to sound forth the praises of Jehovah. In the opening verses of the 29th Psalm the scene is changed, and the call is to the angelic choir.² These heavenly ministrants, like David's earthly choir before the Ark, are represented in "holy attire" (110, 3, mg.), wearing the garments and fulfilling the office of earthly priests, and bowing themselves in worship before the everlasting King (vv. 2, 10).

In God's Temple "Everything saith Glory" (29, 9), and all this glory and beauty begets in the true-hearted worshipper a deep reverence. He will not come to the altar of his God without preparation of both body and soul. He will not neglect the ceremonial cleansing of his hands (26, 6), though it be but the outward symbol of the cleansing of his heart (73, 13). He will bow down in worship before his Maker (95, 6); he will kneel at the footstool of the Holy One, for "great and terrible is his Name" (99, 5, 3); and yet it is

¹ In P.B.V. only in Ps. 96, 9.

² P.B.V., "Ye mighty"; R.V. marg., "sons of God"; here used as equivalent to "angels." On the Hebrew word "Elohim," see Chapter XI A.

the one place on earth where most he longs to find himself (84, 2).

But it is needless to multiply illustrations, which every lover of the Psalms can readily supply, of the glory of the Temple worship and of the response in the heart of the devout worshipper. Yet it may be that, though we recall many such separate illustrations, we fail to combine them into a whole. Our picture still lacks life. If this be so, we may quicken our slow imaginations by turning to a chapter in the Apocryphal Books, where we shall find summed up into a living whole many of the scattered allusions to the great choral services of the second Temple that meet us throughout the Psalter. The date of this passage (Ecclus. 50, 5-21) has not hitherto been fixed with certainty, owing to a doubt between the two High-Priests, who both bore the name of Simon, but this matters nothing for our purpose. At the earliest it will belong to the third century and the days of the Chronicler, or, as seems more probable, it may be a hundred years nearer to our Lord's time. The High-Priest is thus described:

5. "How glorious was he when the people gathered round him
At his coming forth out of the sanctuary !
11. When he took up the robe of glory, . . .
In the ascent of the holy altar. . . .
12. He was as a young cedar in Libanus;
And as stems of palm trees compassed they him round about,
13. And all the sons of Aaron in their glory,
And the Lord's offerings in their hands. . . .
15. He stretched out his hand to the cup,
And poured of the blood of the grape;
He poured out at the foot of the altar
A sweet-smelling savour unto the Most High, the King of all.
16. Then shouted the sons of Aaron,
They sounded the trumpets . . .
They made a great noise to be heard,
For a remembrance before the Most High.

17. Then all the people together hasted,
And fell down upon the earth on their faces
To worship their Lord, the Almighty, God Most High.
18. The singers also praised him with their voices;
In the whole house was there made sweet melody.
19. And the people besought the Lord Most High,
In prayer before him that is merciful. . . .
20. Then he went down, and lifted up his hands
Over the whole congregation of the children of Israel,
To give blessing unto the Lord with his lips,
And to glory in his name.
21. And he bowed himself down in worship the second time,
To declare the blessing from the Most High.”

CHAPTER IX

THE WORKMANSHIP OF THE PSALMS

At each succeeding Eastertide we are reminded anew of the outburst of triumphal thanksgiving that celebrated the crossing of the Red Sea. There, on the safety of the farther shore, Moses led the praises of the people whom Jehovah had "redeemed." There Miriam, with timbrel in hand, guided her fellow-women in the dance, and, to such an accompaniment, the theme of Moses' song was sounded back: "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously" (Exod. 15, 1, 20, 21).

In this great spontaneous act of worship—on no specially hallowed spot, but in the bare country on the edge of the wilderness—we find the Hebrew people following the instinct common to primitive races, and combining in the service of religion, *singing* and *music* and *dancing*. To them, as to other child-races, dancing was not merely a social enjoyment; it was also an integral part of their religious feasts, and in many cases it would be hard to draw a distinguishing line between the two. In the Hebrew mind it was associated not only with such joys as the harvesting of the vintage (Judg. 21, 19, 21), or with the welcome afforded to a popular victor (1 Sam. 18, 6, 7), but with the most profoundly sacred acts of religion, such as David's dancing before the Ark (2 Sam. 6, 14, 15). And this association was not merely a thing of primitive times. It lingered on (as we know from non-Biblical sources) beyond the period of the Maccabees;

and dancing had its own place, not alone on so joyous an occasion as the Feast of Tabernacles, but no less on the evening of the Day of Atonement. Nor were these festal dances always relegated to the city vineyards. On the Feast of Tabernacles the torchlight dance was performed in the Temple courts, the Levites meanwhile chanting appropriate Psalms, to the accompaniment of cymbals and harps and other instruments of music. Some such scene as this we may reasonably imagine as the setting of that noble Hallelujah Psalm with which the Psalter closes:

"Praise him with the sound of the trumpet:
Praise him with the psaltery and harp.
Praise him with the timbrel and dance:
. . . Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."
(150, 3, 4, 6).

In the warlike Psalm immediately preceding we have the same summons (149, 3), and in "A Song," belonging to a much earlier period, the beautiful 30th Psalm, the writer, as he looks upon the festal gladness after a night of sorrow, seems to see in it the literal fulfilment of Jeremiah's promised restoration: "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together, for I will turn their mourning into joy" (cp. 30, 11, with Jer. 31, 4, 13).

One other allusion to dancing has been obscured in our older translations. That perplexing close to the 87th Psalm (P.B.V.): "The singers also and trumpeters shall he rehearse: All my fresh springs shall be in thee" (v. 7), gains a wholly new meaning when we think of it as a part of the holy rejoicing of Israel in welcoming "the nations" to Zion,¹ and read with the Revisers: "They that sing as well as they that dance shall say, *All my fountains are in thee*," and look upon the words in italics as indicating the anthem chosen for the

¹ On this 87th Psalm see further in Chapter XIc. (The Holy Catholick Church).

occasion. The margin, it is true, reads "the players on instruments shall be there," but modern scholarship favours the rendering "They that dance," and since dancing usually presupposes some sort of instrumental accompaniment, we have in this verse the same combination of *verse* and *music* and *dancing* as on the shores of the Red Sea.

But what, it may be asked, has "dancing" to do with the title of this chapter? The connexion is not a fanciful one. Dancing is a real link in the history of Hebrew poetry—a link between the instrumental music and the words of the singer. For Hebrew poetry depends neither upon rhyme nor upon metre—as we understand these terms—but upon *rhythm*; and the rhythmic movements of the dance, in harmony with the instrumental accompaniment, gave form to the songs of those who took part in them. "School-children and uncultured man," says a recent writer on the Psalms,¹ "in reciting poetry fall into a sing-song. Children in writing verse produce defective metre, but discernible rhythm. The rhythm or musical element is what they lay hold of, and the child's characteristics in poetry are seen in Hebrew poetry."

Children's singing games suggest an obvious illustration of the above statement, and one within the experience of us all. There may or may not be a rhyme; the metre may be of the rudest; but alike in, "Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St. Cléments," or in, "Here we go round the mulberry-bush, the mulberry-bush, the mulberry-bush," it is the action and the rhythmical movements that decide the cadences of the song.

Our beautiful Bible and Prayer Book translations of the Psalms do not reproduce this feature of the Hebrew songs, but we catch some idea of it in the following rendering of the opening verses of the 24th Psalm.²

¹ Oesterley.

² *Ibid.*

“To the Lórd the eárrh and its fúlness,
 The wórld and the dwéllers thereín:
 For hé on the wáters hath sét it,
 And on rívers establishéd ít.”

Not all Psalms have the same rhythm. Some are lively and joyous; some are solemn and slow; some are specially associated with dirges—*elegies*, as we might call them—but none of this is apparent to the English reader.

As for *rhyme*, our English ears would not accept for such the accidental “likeness of sound”—often a very defective “likeness”—which is largely due to the use of commonly recurring words with similar terminations—pronouns, for example, which lend themselves to this purpose, just as “Me” and “He” and “Thee” are found to do in our own Hymn-Books. But this so-called “likeness of sound”¹ is often a very defective likeness, extending to the vowel-sound, but not, we are told, to the consonant, and would not be accepted as “rhyme” by English standards.

On the other hand, English readers cannot, unhappily, appreciate the force and delicacy of Hebrew alliteration, unless they have had the good fortune to hear such a couplet as, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper that love thee” (122, 6), recited in its musical original!

Another feature of Hebrew versification which is likewise lost upon English readers is the way in which it makes appeal to the memory, by the *eye* as well as by the *ear*. In the so-called “Alphabet Psalms” (*e.g.*, 9 and 10, 37, 111) each line, or perhaps each line of a couplet, or of a whole verse, begins with a different letter—in due succession—“From A to Z,” as we should say. Sometimes the arrangement is broken and imperfect, owing, no doubt, to the mistakes of copyists, but the original plan can generally be traced. For example, Psalms 9 and 10 are printed in our Bibles as though

¹ Technically called “assonance.”

they were two distinct poems, but careful readers have always observed in them a certain unity of *subject*, and have observed also that Psalm 10 had no separate title of its own. A still closer study of the original language shows that in 9 the verses, as a rule, begin with the letters of the first half of the alphabet, while in 10 the initials found are all of them belonging to the latter half.

The classic example of this form of versification is found, of course, in the 119th Psalm, where the device is highly elaborated, and each one of the eight lines in every one of the twenty-two stanzas begins with its own initial letter—something in this fashion:

“Comfort thy servant. . . .
 Come, open mine eyes . . .
 Consider that I am a stranger. . . .
 Consumed is my soul . . .
 Contempt and reproach do thou turn from me . . .
 Confounded are the proud. . . .
 Counsel have princes taken. . . .
 Continually is my delight in thy testimonies. . . .”¹
 (Vv. 17-24.)

Very artificial and very wearisome we may think it, but clearly a great aid to keeping the many stanzas in their right order.

A second aid to memory is also provided, and one that appeals to eye as well as to ear. The whole teaching of this noble Psalm is built up, as we know, round certain key-words which recur again and again. Our Bible and Prayer Book Versions show *seven* only of these key-words, for they have made the translation “word” serve as the equivalent of two Hebrew synonyms. The Greek translation distinguishes between them,² and one American translator³ gives us “word” and “saying.” No injury is done to the

¹ From *The Psalms by Four Friends*.

² “Logos” and “Logion.”

³ Briggs.

sense by not marking this distinction, and yet the failure so to do obscures the fact that there are *eight* key-words, not seven, and it is plain that the number eight was essential to the author's elaborate mnemonic design.

It is highly probable that in the original design every one of these eight terms—Commandments, Judgments, Law, Precepts, Sayings, Statutes, Testimonies, Word—was represented in a separate couplet of each one of the twenty-two stanzas. It is not surprising that so long and complicated a scheme should in course of time have suffered damage. In three only of the stanzas are all the eight watchwords to be found.¹ In many the same terms occur twice or thrice, at haphazard as it were, and there are four or five couplets² from which the key-words are altogether missing.

But if these refinements and conceits of Hebrew versification are practically lost to English readers, it is possessed of many other and more striking characteristics that are happily plain to us, even in the studied uniformity of the Prayer Book translation, and that stand out with a wholly new distinctness in the Revised Version, where we are enabled to recognize more clearly the typical structure of the Psalms.

In some churches it is not the whole verse of a Psalm that is sung by the different sides of the choir in alternation, but the separate half of each verse, and where this is the practice we see readily that *each verse is a complete whole in itself*, the second half completing or perfecting the first. This it does in three special ways. It may—

1. Repeat the thought.
2. Amplify the thought.
3. Reverse the thought.

¹ Vau, Cheth, Jod.

² Verses 90, 91, 122, 132, to which might be added in strictness 121.

To illustrate what is meant, let us look at the 20th and the 34th Psalms, which will each of them furnish us with very plain examples of all three forms, technically described as—*synonymous*, *synthetic*, and *antithetical*.

PSALM 20.

No. 1. **Synonymous.**

- v. 4. Grant thee thy heart's desire,
And fulfil all thy mind (P.B.V.).

No. 2. **Synthetic.**

- v. 1. The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble;
The name of the God of Jacob set thee up on high.

No. 3. **Antithetical.**

- v. 8. They are bowed down and fallen;
But we are risen, and stand upright.

PSALM 34.

No. 1. **Synonymous.**

- v. 13. Keep thy tongue from evil,
And thy lips from speaking guile.

No. 2. **Synthetic.**

- v. 6. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him,
And saved him out of all his troubles.

No. 3. **Antithetical.**

- v. 10. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;
But they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.

These evenly balanced phrases, running side by side, and as it were answering one another—*parallelisms* as they are called—are the foundation of Hebrew poetry. They are found in every Psalm, and in every verse of the Psalms—as also in the poetical portions of the Prophets (*e.g.*, Isa. 38, Hab. 3)—and are treated in many different ways.

It is well worth while to study if it be but the outline of

the subject in some one of the many standard handbooks to the Psalms, for the sake of the wonderful increase of enjoyment that even a very little knowledge will bring with it. For this purpose, however, it is imperative for us to work with the Revised Version. There we shall see at a glance, as we cannot see in the Prayer Book, that the verses, instead of uniformly consisting of a couple of phrases, divided by a colon, are printed in lines of varying lengths and number, more nearly representing the original arrangement. There are verses that contain three, four, and even five lines (*e.g.*, 40, 5)—verses that still repeat or amplify or reverse the leading thought, but which from their very fullness of word and meaning are somewhat difficult to deal with by our ordinary methods of English chanting, and which often seem thereby imprisoned.

In this respect, then, the Revised Version gives us a much better idea than our older translations of the freedom and variety of treatment made use of by the Hebrew Psalmists, but, except in a few instances, it has not ventured upon the more uncertain task of attempting to restore the separate stanzas or *strophes*. In the 119th Psalm Jewish usage had already made this plain, and where the natural division into stanzas is very obviously marked out—as for instance by a refrain—the R.V. does indicate them (see Ps. 57, 5, 11 with its refrain, “Be thou exalted . . . above the heavens . . . and above all the earth”; or 80, 3, 7, 19, with its thrice-repeated prayer, “Cause thy face to shine”).

It cannot be denied that a great help is afforded to the eye when the Psalms are set forth like other poetry,¹ with all the advantages of accepted poetical forms, but to do this for the Psalter on any large scale would not be simply a matter of rearranging the printed page, but would certainly involve many conjectural emendations.

¹ As for instance in *The International Critical Commentary*.

To return, however, for a moment to the "discoveries" that we can all of us have the pleasure of making for ourselves, so soon as we have acquired the most elementary knowledge of the ways of Hebrew verse. For some of us it will be a new delight to distinguish minor varieties of "parallelisms"—such as *the emblematic*, which teach by comparisons, and which frequently begin with the words "As" or "Like." These abound throughout the Psalter, and examples will occur to everyone: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks" (42, 1); "Like as a father pitieth his children" (103, 13).

A still greater delight will be to recognize, and under its proper name, a form of parallelism of which we have all of us, consciously or unconsciously, felt the special beauty, in which the same word is repeated, with ever-deepening effect, as in that grand storm Psalm (29th) with its sevenfold repetition, "The voice of the Lord"; or as in the Psalm 145, with its fourfold stress on the glory of God's "Kingdom" (vv. 11-13); or the little words "keep" and "keeper" in the 121st Psalm.

This last is perhaps the most perfect example of all of what is called "the *stair-like*¹ parallelism." As we read the successive verses we feel how the promise of the Divine safe-keeping rises ever higher and higher, step by step, till it closes with a pledge of perfect security, alike for body and soul, "from all evil for evermore."

But here we find ourselves passing from the mechanism of Hebrew versification into the very heart and spirit of "the Poetry of the Psalms," and that must claim a chapter to itself.

¹ Otherwise known as "the climatic."

CHAPTER XA

THE POETRY OF THE PSALMS

(In Nature and in Revelation)

WE are all of us prepared to admit that fortunately a knowledge of botany is not an indispensable condition of our enjoyment of flowers, though such knowledge does immensely increase our enjoyment of them. In like manner we find that a knowledge, less or greater, of the laws of Hebrew verse adds a new element to our appreciation of the workmanship of the Psalter; yet here again, fortunately for us, our consciousness of the *spirit of poetry* in the Psalms is something wholly independent of any such technical knowledge—a something that we each one of us recognize and welcome in our own special way. It will never be known in how many minds, whether of young children or of the unlearned, the love of poetry has first been awakened by the Book of Psalms. How the *music* of detached phrases such as the challenge, “Who is the King of Glory?” with its ringing answer (24, 8–10); or the pitiful lament over the downtrodden vine whose branches of old “reached unto the river” (80, 11–16); or the image of the eastern sun going forth “as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber” (19, 5), lingers in the memory, whether the meaning be grasped or not. And thus a door is opened to the power of poetry.

It is part of the perpetual miracle of the Psalter that it so readily admits of translation. Of much of the finest poetry

we constantly hear it said, "It is worth comparatively little apart from its own tongue"; or, "Those who cannot read it in the original can never really know it." We who are not Hebrew scholars cannot, it is true, estimate our loss in not being able to read the Psalms in their own language, but we can estimate their worth to ourselves in whatever translation we best know them. And the Psalms have been translated into wellnigh every known speech, and still they speak to every man in the language wherein he was born. They are still studied in the ancient Greek version¹ that once made them live anew to thousands of Jews, as well as to the Christian Fathers; and in the sonorous Latin,² that to this day seems to many their natural language, they still speak to multitudes. In our own stately English version,³ in the time-honoured beauty of our Prayer Book translation, and in the passionately beloved Scottish "paraphrases," their message is carried throughout the globe. It sounds forth anew in the ancient and complex languages of the Far East, and in African and Polynesian dialects, themselves so newly committed to writing that even to name them would be a task beyond our powers.

Very crude and very faulty, no doubt, are many of these translations of the great world-wide Hymn-Book of the Universal Church. *Faulty*, indeed, they must needs be, for not even the ablest of Hebrew scholars can reconstruct the exact text of the far-distant original, or can be certain of the precise shade of meaning once belonging to words that have been gradually modified by the changing usage of successive centuries.

We all of us know that occasionally the Bible and the Prayer Book versions give, not a different rendering merely, but a somewhat different sense. The 68th Psalm alone furnishes several examples of this: In verse 6, for instance,

¹ Septuagint.² Vulgate.³ A.V.

the familiar words of the Prayer Book, "He is the God that maketh men to be of one mind in an house," receive a wholly new turn in the A.V.—"God setteth the solitary in families"; or, as the R.V. margin puts it, "God maketh the solitary to dwell in an house."¹

The various metrical versions in particular continually add a colouring of their own. There is a wide difference between the Hebrew Psalmist's admiring commendation of the large-hearted giver (112, 5) as seen in the R.V.—"Well is it with the man that *dealeth graciously and lendeth*; he shall *maintain his cause in judgment*"—and the calculating worldliness of the old "Tate and Brady" version (once so commonly bound up with the Prayer Book, as though a part of it):

His lib'ral favours he extends,
To some he gives, to others lends;
Yet what his charity impairs,
He saves by prudence in affairs."

Here, however, the connecting-link may perhaps be found in the A.V.: "A good man *sheweth favour* and lendeth; he will *guide his affairs with discretion*" (marg.: "*judgment*").

There are other cases, not a few, in which our English versions give a sense which is no longer considered grammatically tenable, yet a sense so striking in itself that it has completely passed into the language, and continues to hold a place of its own side by side with the amended translation.

To this class belong two notable Prayer Book renderings. "*Her foundations* are upon the holy hills" (87, 1) has become a classical description of Zion, but it loses the grandeur of the original thought, that Jehovah himself has deigned to take the holy mountains as the foundations of his earthly throne, and this is restored in the Bible renderings (both

¹ Cp. also vv. 11, 13, 16 in P.B.V., and in R.V.

A.V. and R.V.) by the change of pronoun: "*His* foundation is in the holy mountains." In the other instance (105, 18) we pass from a phrase instinct with poetry to a literal statement of fact. "The iron entered into his soul" sums up in six words the experience of many a prisoner since Joseph's day. The Psalmist was thinking primarily of the hard bodily facts: "His feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in chains of iron" (R.V.); only, he uses the expressive Hebrew idiom that brings soul and body so near together, and writes "*His soul entered into the iron*" (R.V. marg.).

It is noteworthy that some of the earlier and ruder renderings not only go straight to the very heart of the Hebrew songs, but by the simplicity of their diction come closer than later translations to the language of the original. Here is an old version of the 23rd Psalm, used by the Scottish Covenanters,¹ that loses nothing of the trustful clinging of that much-loved fourth verse:

"No, though I go through the dead-mirk dale,
Even there shall I fear no hurting;
For yourself is near by me.
Your rod and your staff hold me full cheerfully."

In vain we look here for one familiar phrase, "The valley of the *shadow of death*"; but if we turn to the Revised Version we shall find against those words the marginal note "Or, *deep darkness* (and so elsewhere)," meaning that both here, and in the Book of Job and in Isaiah, it is rather a beautiful paraphrase than an exact translation, though it is a paraphrase as old as the Septuagint. The old Scotch rendering "the dead-mirk dale" seems, therefore, to be a curiously faithful equivalent of the original word-picture of the dark and gloomy ravine.

It remains, then, that in spite of all the manifold errors

¹ The writer knows this quotation at second-hand only, so cannot give source or date.

and imperfections necessarily appertaining to translations, it is not merely the *spiritual* worth of the Psalter that has survived the process. In greater or less degree its matchless poetic beauty still shines forth, so that all those who are steeped in the language of the Psalter have, in some sort, a common language, for all alike speak "the tongue of Canaan" (Isa. 19, 18). A strong bond is this, and one that peculiarly fits the Book of Psalms to be the Hymn-Book of the Universal Church.

To this collection of sacred verse our English Prayer Book has boldly given the title "The Psalms of David," thereby carrying on the ancient and unquestioning tradition that associated the entire Book with one dominant and beloved personality (see Chapter VI).

In so doing the Prayer Book does but follow the usage of many of the New Testament writers, and no doubt it was likewise influenced by the words of a yet earlier author. The first known tribute to the poetic beauty of the Psalter—and it would be difficult to surpass it—is found in the Son of Sirach's roll-call of the benefactors of his race. In often-quoted words (Ecclus. 47, 8) he thus speaks of David:

"In every work of his he gave thanks to the Holy One
Most High with words of glory;
With his whole heart he sang praise,
And loved him that made him."

How, indeed, can the whole form and spirit of the Psalms be more completely summed up than in this one verse—*words of glory*, springing forth from a thankful heart, uplifted to "the Holy One Most High"?

Not wholly unworthy to be placed side by side with this noble passage from the Jewish poet is the following phrase from our own Sir Philip Sidney: "And may I not say that *the holy David's Psalms are a Divine poem?*" Sidney then goes on to enlarge on this theme. "For what else," asks

he, "is the awaking of his musical instruments; the often changing of his persons; his notable prosopopœias [personifications], when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in his majesty; his telling of the beasts' joyfulness, and hills leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein he sheweth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty, to be seen by the eyes of the mind, cleared by faith."¹

Sidney is here thinking chiefly of God as manifested in Nature, and probably, to the majority of minds, the earliest appeal of the Psalms has come through their pictures, first of all the familiar earthly beauty, all the fair things of earth and sky; and then, again, of the changes wrought by fire and storm and earthquake, and each several aspect of Nature, pictures, joyous or awful—all of them filled with the thought of God.

Humboldt has somewhere observed² that it is a characteristic of Hebrew poetry that it "always embraces the whole world in its unity, comprehending the life of the terrestrial globe as well as the shining regions of space." It is finely said; and we feel how the endeavour of the Psalmists "to embrace the whole world in its unity" is shown in such Psalms as the 8th, the 104th, and the 148th. But when Humboldt goes on to say that the Hebrew poets "dwell less on details of phenomena than on the contemplation of great masses," he seems to do scant justice to all the countless delicate touches that go to build up the Psalmists' pictures—the rain-softened earth (65, 10), the tender green of the pastures by the quiet stream (23, 2), the sun-scorched grass upon the house-tops (129, 6), the dove, her gold and silver pinions shining as she flies (68, 13), the timid conies finding their refuge in the rock (104, 18)—to call to mind only a few among the many examples.

¹ *A Defence of Poesie.*

² Quoted in Palgrave's *Landscape in Poetry.*

Often in the Psalms we see Nature set in relation to Man. They show us the sailor, bewildered, almost despairing, exposed to the full fury of the storm (107, 23-30), and the settlers reclaiming waste lands, sowing their fields, and building for themselves new homes (107, 33-37); or the soldier in hot pursuit, drinking by the wayside brook (110, 6, 7); while in what has been called "The Peasant's Psalm"¹ (129) all the images are drawn from the toilsome labour of ploughman and reaper, and from the customary greetings interchanged among the workers as they pass to and fro.

Far oftener, however, all this close observation of Nature carries the thought of the Psalmist straight upwards to the God of glory, and shows him holding and guiding the mighty forces that he has created—flying swiftly upon the wings of the wind, curtained in thick darkness (18, 10, 11), causing winds and flames to serve him (104, 4), uttering his voice in the thunder of the waves, and himself sitting enthroned over the tumult (93, 2-4), as once he sat enthroned over the Flood (29, 3-10). And then, again, in Psalms that come still closer to our hearts, this mighty God is shown as the Shepherd of his Chosen People, tending and guiding his human flock (77, 15-20; 80, 1), and—most comforting image of all—as a tender Father, understanding and pitying the weakness of his children (103, 13, 14).

If the awe-inspiring aspect of Nature is abundantly set forth in the Psalms, so, too, in even greater abundance, is its gladsome aspect. There we find the messenger-winds fulfilling their appointed tasks (104, 4; 147, 18); the corn-laden valleys shouting and singing for joy (65, 13); "the trees of the wood" rejoicing before the coming of the Lord, and "the fields exulting" (96, 12, 13), and the opening and the closing of each succeeding day sounding forth gladness (65, 8), till we reach that great Hallelujah Chorus

¹ *New Cathedral Psalter.*

of the 148th Psalm, that begins with the angelic host and ends with the old men and the children, and embraces the heavenly bodies and the sea-monsters—the beasts and cattle, and the creeping things of earth. But the author of the 104th Psalm rises yet higher than this. He is not content to rest in the thought of “the fair music that all creatures made to their great Lord,” nor even to pray that this Divine glory may endure everlastingly (104, 31). He boldly calls upon the very Creator and Upholder of all this “glory” to take his own part in the universal joy of that world which he alike creates and renews (v. 30). *Let the Lord rejoice in his works*, cries the Psalmist (v. 31), and here, as it has been observed,¹ the “Hebrew poet strikes a note unknown to Athens or to Rome.”

With what different eyes would many of us look upon all the manifold riches of earth and sea were we not steeped in the language of the Psalter! Well may many of us feel that the Psalms are for ever teaching us to see new glories and new meanings in Nature; for ever giving us fitting words to express that which we see, and morning by morning opening our ears and enlarging our hearts (cp. Isa. 50, 4) that we may hear, if it be but “a small whisper” of God’s voice, and “understand,” though it be “but the outskirts of his ways” (Job 26, 14).

The attitude of many of the Hebrew Psalmists towards Nature may be summed up in words of an English poet: “Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God.”² But there are other of the Psalmists, not one whit less responsive than their fellow-singers to every sight and sound of the natural world around them, and drawing from them spiritual lessons no less deep, who yet have little place in their scheme of things for any such *unconscious* worship. To these writers *worship* means the conscious ordered service offered by

¹ Palgrave, *Landscape in Poetry*.

² Coleridge.

spiritual beings to their all-holy God. Very lovely examples of this class of Psalm are to be found in the collection associated with the name of "the sons of Korah." Three of these Psalms (42, 43, 84)—or rather two of them, as we may say, for 42 and 43 are clearly portions of a whole that has at some time been divided—have so much in common that it has been suggested that both come from the same hand, and that the writer was a Hebrew exile, cut off from all the joyous fellowship of worship in the Temple. But the theory of a common authorship is difficult to maintain; for though the poems are alike in *feeling*, they presuppose somewhat different situations. Surely, however, it is not necessary to seek in all poetry an exact transcript of personal experiences; but be this as it may, the question of authorship matters nothing to our present purpose, and, for that purpose only, we will venture to regard the three as a single poem. In all three we find a succession of home pictures that rise up before the inward eye of the poet, and we find, too, that each fresh picture serves to lift his heart Godwards. The thirsty hart panting for the water-brooks is an image of his own soul, with its far deeper thirst. The memory of the nesting birds within the walls of the Temple turns his thoughts to those happy worshippers still privileged to offer their praises within the courts of the Lord. The recollection of the parched road up to Jerusalem, refreshed by the spring rains, brings to him its promise of future blessing. Through the remembered sound of the cataracts of Jordan rushing down in sudden flood, there comes upon him the image of the pitiless storm that is sweeping over his own life. Yet there comes also the thought that the rocks still stand unmoved, and that out of the tumult his prayer is already being answered, with a song of hope from that eternal "Rock" who is the very God of his life. Nature has done her healing part, and, with hope and strength

made new, the exile loses sight of the careless swallows and sparrows flying around the altar, and looks forward to the glad day when he himself, the humble, adoring worshipper, shall approach that sacred altar of his King, his God, his "exceeding joy" (cp. 42, 1, 2, 4, 6, 9; 43, 4; 84, 3, 5, 6).

It is not difficult to feel the poetry of Psalms like these, which speak of the glory of worship, which bring before us the solemn processions that attend the goings of the Great King into the sanctuary (68, 24), or that tell of the sacred visions there vouchsafed to the longing soul (63, 1, 2)—privileges such as God can grant only to "the saints," to "a people near unto him" (148, 14), to those "who wait only upon God" (62, 1).

But can we do a harder thing, and recognize the poetry of those Psalms which are devoted to the praise neither of God's *worship* nor of God's *works*, but rather to the praise of his *word*?

One Psalm, indeed, there is, most precious and most familiar, which in brief compass sets forth the glory both of Creation and of Revelation (19). The two portions of this 19th Psalm have become so linked together that it is difficult to think of them apart; but scholars tell us that they are two wholly distinct poems, belonging to different periods—differing in metre as in purpose—which have at some time or other been most happily welded together (cp. vv. 1-6 with vv. 7-14).

Those Psalms that have for their special object the glorification of "the law of the Lord" (e.g., 1; 19, 7-14; 119) are all classed together as of comparatively late date, and as pointing to a period long after the Return from Exile, to a time when the great body of the Old Testament Scriptures was already in existence, and when the study and exposition of the written word had already called into being "scribes" like Ezra, and fervent students like the nameless

authors of the three Psalms just specified, who found at once their vocation and their joy in their daily and nightly meditations (119, 147, 148) on the sacred words that revealed to them the righteousness of God, and thereby set the standard of righteousness for the servants of God (19, 7; 119, 1-4, 63).

If we look at the last seven verses of the 19th Psalm we shall observe that it is a miniature edition of the long 119th Psalm. Five of the same "legal" terms¹ occur in it—*Law, Testimony, Precepts, Commandment, Judgments*. There are, too, the same metaphors—"the fine gold" and "the sweetness of the honeycomb"—and there are the like earnest prayers to be kept back from sin, and to have the hidden life made clear from fault.

But there are very many who appreciate the loveliness of the 19th Psalm, and yet are discouraged to weariness by the length of the 119th, with its many repetitions, and who fail to find in its evenly balanced clauses and its sameness of subject any poetic beauty whatever. Probably no one has ever yet been *argued* into loving the 119th Psalm, though happily there are not a few who have *grown* into loving it, and who have, like Ruskin, lived to be deeply thankful that they were drilled into familiarity with it in childhood.

For English church-goers, at any rate, a Psalm which month by month makes a claim on three successive days of their worship, must needs hold a very prominent place of its own; and, inevitably, different minds look upon it from widely different points of view. Some are fascinated by the attempt to discover the secrets of its careful workmanship (see pp. 112-114); others set themselves to piece together all the autobiographical hints scattered through the 176 verses, in the never-satisfied hope of gaining some clear

¹ Cp., pp. 113, 114, the eight keywords of Ps. 119.

picture of the man who wrote them and of the circumstances of his life. Others, again, in all ages have been content to take this Psalm simply as a colloquy between God and the soul, in which they find set down their own innermost sorrows, their own deepest sense of shortcoming, but where they no less find their own purest aspirations, their own most blessed and most unutterable experiences. It is indeed a song of spiritual experience, and therefore—to quote the words of one among its many lovers—“This Psalm of the dedicated life may repel us in youth by its monotonous insistentcies, but with every added year it reveals its depth, riches, and variety of meaning.”¹

It is just possible that for some of us new light might fall upon these 176 verses if, for once, in reading them through we should imagine them as on the lips of the Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus—or shall we rather say as on the lips of “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ”? (Titus 1, 1).

But this much at least is certain, that the more deeply we study the labyrinths of this 119th Psalm, the more we shall realize both its *meaning* and its *music*. We shall, of course, quickly rise out of our first childish belief that its praises are limited to the thought of the *written* word of God—to the inspired messages of Law-giver and Prophet, however sacred and helpful. Very soon we begin to see for ourselves that when this unknown Hebrew Psalmist speaks of “the Law” he is thinking of it as the representative of the will of the living God; and that when he speaks of “the word” of his God he is unconsciously drawing very near to the conception that was still waiting to be revealed in its fulness by the writer of the Fourth Gospel. To the Psalmist, as well as to the Evangelist, the true home of “God’s word” was not to be found on earth: “For ever, O Lord,

¹ *New Cathedral Psalter*.

thy word is settled in heaven " (v. 89), and to this *word* or *law* of Jehovah he looks for the help and salvation that other Old Testament writers regard as coming from God alone¹ (cp. vv. 74, 81, 92, 131), as though he were identifying the Law with the heavenly Law-giver.

And as to the *music* of this Psalm, who shall put that into other words than its own? Yet all of us can hear the imploring, plaintive cry of humanity—longing, failing; stretching out hands to the unseen help, and, through all its deadness of heart and its frequent falls, clinging to the sure word of promise in that nine-times repeated prayer: "*Quicken thou me—according to thy word, thy righteousness, thy loving-kindness*" (cp. vv. 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159). And in answer to this prayer come the deep-toned assurances of the Divine strength and righteousness and immutability, holding fast in its grasp heaven and earth and God's poor servant—an eternal guardianship extending throughout all generations (vv. 89–91); causing man's darkness to shine with heaven-reflected light (vv. 105, 130, 135), and giving strength to man's weakness by the confidence that he has behind and beneath him God's everlasting righteousness, and a Law that is very Truth (v. 142). And the soul makes answer: "I have remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself" (v. 52).

But "The Poetry of the Psalms" is indeed an inexhaustible subject, and in the second part of this chapter we will limit ourselves to the comparatively narrow field of the so-called "Asaph Psalms."

¹ See Briggs, vol. ii., p. 71.

CHAPTER XB

THE POETRY OF THE PSALMS—(*continued*)

(*The Asaph Psalter*)

THE little collection known as "The Psalms of Asaph," from which we propose to draw our illustrations in this chapter, has a double advantage for our purpose. It is slender in bulk, containing only a dozen poems (Ps. 50, and 73-83 inclusive), and yet in this small compass it provides us with examples of different *styles* of Hebrew poetry—lyric, didactic, and what we may perhaps call "philosophic" verse. Drama proper is clearly wanting in the Psalter, though many of the Psalms are highly "dramatic" in conception, as, for example (in this very Asaph Psalter), those companion Psalms of Judgment (50 and 82), alike in subject and yet so wholly distinct. In the 82nd Psalm the True Judge is represented standing amidst the unjust judges of earth, and in burning words convicts them of their heartless iniquities and pronounces their doom. In the 50th Psalm God is shown "as at once plaintiff and judge,"¹ and makes solemn appeal—with heaven and earth as witnesses—to his own blinded people, not to cheat themselves with the belief that faithfulness in outward observances and sacrifices can make amends for unfaithfulness in heart.

Epic poetry is also wanting, though it has been suggested² that fragments of some ancient "unwritten epic" may lie

¹ Kirkpatrick.

² Oesterley.

embedded in those verses of one of the Asaph Psalms which speak of the destruction of "leviathan" and of the water-dragons (74, 12-14).

But the great majority of the Psalms are to be classed as *Lyrics*—a very broad classification, embracing many subdivisions, such as historical, didactic, elegiac verse. A *lyric*, according to its derivation, is "That which is sung to the lyre," but it has come to mean any sort of poem that expresses the personal emotions of the poet, whether sorrowful or joyous, and the impression made on his own mind by Nature, or by History, or by the experience of life.

Asaph—for convenience' sake the personal name is here made use of to indicate all the Psalms belonging to this group—"Asaph" then, gives us a very perfect example of the *subjective* lyric in the Psalm beginning "I will cry unto God with my voice" (77). The *historic* lyric is finely illustrated in the "Song" that has been very generally believed to commemorate the destruction of Sennacherib's army (76). The long *meditative*¹ poem that looks back upon the National History, and makes its stirring appeal to the men of the present to profit by the lessons of the past (78), stands out in the forefront of *didactic* Psalms. Somewhat different in character from any of these, are the *philosophic* poems that are occupied with generalizations or moralizings on ethics and social life. Asaph gives us one great example of this class in the 73rd Psalm. Poems of this nature find no place in primitive poetry, but gradually come into being as existence grows increasingly complex, and its inequalities begin to press on men's minds. This noble cry of Asaph's, so familiar to us in the Prayer-Book rendering: "Truly God is loving unto Israel: even unto such as are of a clean heart. Nevertheless, my feet were almost gone . . ." has many resemblances to passages in the Book of Job, while others of

¹ Maschil (see p. 39).

the *philosophic* Psalms have more kinship with the Book of Proverbs.¹ All these Psalms dealing with the problems of life are often referred to as "belonging to the Wisdom Literature," because they are coloured with the same thoughts and expressions that are found in Job and Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Technically they are frequently spoken of as "*gnomic*² Psalms," which only means that their teaching or "wisdom" is often cast into the form of a maxim—a sort of "proverbial philosophy," as we might say.

From all this it will appear that the Asaph collection, small though it be, is a very representative collection. Yet with all its diversity it displays a certain unity of thought, which enhances its interest and gives it a marked character of its own. So much is this the case that the many points of likeness among its different poems have insensibly made themselves apparent even to wholly untrained readers, studying these Psalms only as they stand in the Prayer Book, unnamed and unannotated. One such youthful reader, indeed, on turning to the Authorized Version in quest of further information, and finding the name of "Asaph" against all the Psalms in this group, and also against the 50th Psalm, was happily satisfied that the common authorship completely explained the matter, and gladly accepted the unknown Asaph as a favourite poet! Unfortunately, however, the problem cannot be solved in so simple a fashion, for when tried by our old threefold test—of Language, Historical Allusions, Relation to Other Scriptures (see Chapters VA and VB)—it becomes evident that, in spite of their common features, these twelve Psalms

¹ For instance, such verses as these: "The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again; but the righteous dealeth graciously, and giveth" (37, 21); or, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (111, 10).

² From a Greek word *gnome*, meaning the opinions or "maxims" of the wise, thrown into metrical form.

cannot all of them have sprung from one author, or even from any one period. The explanation must be sought elsewhere, and it may not unreasonably be sought in the unknown *Editor* of the little collection, living—so far as may be guessed from various small indications—about the year B.C. 300 (see p. 35), who chose out from among songs and poems old and new, such as appealed to his own special cast of mind—sometimes altering, sometimes combining (after the fashion of Hymn-book makers!), and finally, perhaps, connecting his anthology with the name of David's master-musician, Asaph, whose fame looms large in the Books of the Chronicles.

Be this as it may, the Asaph collection stands out as a conspicuous illustration of the principle of grouping detached poems according to *subject* (see pp. 26, 27). It has always been a puzzle why one solitary Psalm ascribed to Asaph (50) should stand apart from the rest, to which it seems so naturally to belong. No certain answer can ever be arrived at, but there is a strong consensus of opinion that the separation was made by one of these various editors for purposes of his own, and that in an earlier arrangement of the Psalter the entire Asaph collection followed on in unbroken sequence from our present Psalms 49 and 50. Possibly, indeed, the Asaph Psalter rightly begins with the 49th Psalm, that impressive "philosophic" poem, which in the title is ascribed to "the Sons of Korah," but which has so much in common with "Asaph's" 73rd Psalm—alike in its doubts and troubles, and in its final triumphant faith. Most probably it has passed through the minds of not a few of the readers of this solemn call to "all the inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together" (49, 1, 2), that it seems more in keeping with the general tone of the Asaph Psalter than of the Korahite collection in which it

now finds a place, and in recent times a well-known authority on the subject¹ has declared his belief that the Psalm belongs of right to the Asaph collection, and that its inclusion in the Korahite Psalter is due to the unconscious error of some early copyist. Such possible errors of ascription, in documents more than two thousand years old, need surely not surprise or perturb us, when we find a war-time Hymnal of the twentieth century assigning to Bishop Heber stanzas extracted from Keble's "Sun of my soul."

The distinction between the two collections must not be unduly pressed, but to some minds it appears to be very real. The "Songs" and "Psalms" of *the sons of Korah* rise to a joyousness² (e.g., 45, 47, 87) which is never reached at all in the Asaph collection; and though they are not untouched by national or by individual sorrows (e.g., 42, 44, 46, 85), yet these sorrows are of a simpler, more objective nature than the problems which exercise the "Asaph" Psalmists, and they are faced with a calmer assurance of *hope* than is traceable in the faithful wrestlings of the writers of the Asaph Psalter.

The twelve (or thirteen) Psalms that compose the Asaph group are admittedly marked by a high degree of originality. These nameless singers have, indeed, their own "literary obligations," but far more towards the prophets and the historians than towards their fellow-psalmists. They have pondered the old stories of Exodus and of Judges till they have become a part of themselves; they have drunk deep of the spirit of Hosea and Isaiah, of the Deuteronomist and

¹ Briggs on Psalm 49.

² It may well be objected that the 88th Psalm—likewise ascribed to "The sons of Korah"—is the most mournful in the entire Psalter; but the "title" shows that this Psalm has a long and complicated history behind it, and here, too, it is questioned whether this Psalm was included in the original Korahite collection. See Briggs on Psalm 86.

of Jeremiah. To give references would be an endless task, and indeed they stand forth in numbers on the margin of every single "Asaph" Psalm.

These poems abound in lovely cadences that arrest the ear, and in bold, distinctive images that stamp themselves for ever upon the mind—the cup of judgment (73, 10; 75, 8); the great assize (50; 82); the Shepherd of Israel leading forth his human flock (80, 1; 77, 20); the mighty spoilers sitting motionless as their own useless chariots (76, 5, 6); Jerusalem "in heaps," her temple profaned, and none to bury her dead (79, 1–3; 74, 4–7); the wild boar out of the wood ravaging the glorious vine (80, 8–13); the forest fires setting the very mountains aflame (83, 13–15).

And who can be insensible to the haunting plaints of the more personal Psalms? "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" (77, 9); "My flesh and my heart faileth" (73, 26); "It was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God" (73, 16, 17).

And are there any of the "didactic" Psalms that hold more unforgettable phrases than that great Lesson-Book of Nations, the 78th Psalm? Who does not recall those half-hearted soldiers who "turned back in the day of battle," and failed "like a deceitful bow" at the very moment of crisis (vv. 9, 57), and those other faithless ones whom trouble and terror alone forced into a seeming reliance on "the Most High God," but whose "heart was not right with him" (v. 37)—men so blind to the inexhaustible compassion of their God that they "would have none of him" (81, 11), and shut themselves out from the fresh mercies that he was only waiting to bestow on them (81, 13–16)?

The reader may have observed in the foregoing paragraphs how kindred subjects recur in these different Psalms, and may have begun to feel what scholars mean when they tell us that the Asaph Psalter is distinguished by a unity

both of thought and diction. For example, we may recognize such common points as these—

1. *A certain sombreness of tone.* The 81st Psalm is the only one that can be described as joyous, and even that one ends on a note of warning—"So much had been done, so much more might have been done" (vv. 13-16).

2. *Treatment of Nature.* This is no less poetical than in the beautiful liturgical Psalms of "the sons of Korah" or in those found in the later divisions of the Psalter, but it is curiously different. There is no fond dwelling upon Nature for its own sake, as in the 104th Psalm or as in the Hallelujah Psalms. There is no attempt or desire to *personify* Nature, but always we find it treated as an instrument in God's hand, displaying the Divine Majesty, and sometimes the Divine terrors; yet always the Divine mercy over against the frailty and sinfulness of man (*e.g.*, 50, 1, 3; 74, 12-17; 80, 8-16; 83, 13-16).

3. *Their strongly historical and didactic turn*, drawing out for the present the lessons of the past.

4. Their close relations to the Prophetic writings.

5. Their ever-present sense of the weight of misery of this earth, and a passionate desire to see the Divine justice openly vindicated against the taunts of the godless, who throw out the challenge, "How doth God know?" (73, 11).

6. Their faith in the ultimate coming of that all-righteous Judge: "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence" (50, 3), a conviction that underlies the steadfast courage of other of the Asaph Psalms (*e.g.*, 75; 76, 8-11; 78; 82; 83, 1, 16-18), and which gives to the author of the 49th Psalm (vv. 5, 13, 15) his hard-won peace.

Stern and heart-searching indeed are these "Asaph" Psalms. As we read them we feel that they all spring from a world of trouble and perplexity, a world of "dark places" and "cruel habitations" (74, 21, P.B.V.). But if these

Psalms are impressed upon us by their very severity, they are no less endeared to us by many a passage of matchless tenderness.

On the Divine side these Psalmists show us the strong, patient Shepherd of Israel, guiding his flock through sea and wilderness (77, 16-20; 78, 52; 80, 1), listening to the cry of the doubting and weak-hearted (73, 2, 28; 77, 1, 2), in very mercy "remembering" the infirmities of his people (78, 38, 39), and rising up in defence of "all the meek upon earth" (76, 9).

And on the human side they show us heavily burdened men, sore bestead (*e.g.*, 73, 16, 26; 77, 2; 80, 4-6), yet still clinging to the faith of their fathers (74, 12; 78, 1-7), still stretching out their hands through the night (77, 2) to their unseen Guide, and finding in him, and in him only, "the one chiefest eternal Good"¹ sufficing for earth as well as for heaven (73, 23-26; *cp.* 49, 15)—for the life they knew, and for the uncharted life that lay before them.

¹ "Imitation of Christ."

CHAPTER XI^A

THE CREED IN THE PSALTER

(I believe in God Almighty)

IN this chapter and the two which succeed it, we are going to set ourselves to study the *religious ideas* of the Psalms. We might do this in many different ways, but the one we will choose for our purpose is to approach it from the side of our Christian Creed.

Let us imagine a Jew in the fourth century of the Christian era, living in Rome, and offering himself for Christian Baptism, and being to that end instructed as a catechumen in the articles of the Roman Creed known to us as the "Apostles' Creed." For our purpose we will set aside all his religious beliefs except such as are to be deduced from the Book of Psalms—that book so well known, so dearly prized by the devout Jew—and our problem shall be to discover how far such a preparation would enable him to answer affirmatively the successive questions of the Baptismal Creed. Let us take the clauses one by one, breaking them up where needful into subdivisions, and decide which of them already stand out perfectly clear and familiar to him in his old faith, which of them are only faintly to be discerned therein, and which of them come to him as something wholly new and startling.

It is much to be desired that at this stage all readers would pause, close the book, take pen and paper, and work out the answer for themselves before going farther. The

attempt will assuredly bring home to us the far-reaching scope of the inquiry, and the tremendous questions which it involves. No less surely it will teach us more as to the nearness on the one hand and the distance on the other between the Old Testament and the New, than we should ever learn from the mere passive reading of a dozen hand-books. Moreover, it will prepare us for a better understanding of what scholars have taught on this inexhaustible subject. All that can be attempted here is to suggest a method of work, and to sketch in outline some sort of answer to the problem proposed, taking as our guide our English form of the Apostles' Creed found in the Baptismal Service for Adults. But in doing this we must remember that we are laying ourselves open to well-grounded charges of making most serious anachronisms! The Baptismal Creed has been slowly built up through some seven or eight centuries, and it is beyond dispute that some of the questions now asked would not have been asked of a baptismal candidate of the period we have in mind, because it was not till a considerably later time that we find all the existing clauses embodied in any one Creed. The *forms* varied largely, but there is good and sufficient evidence to show that by the time we have named, the *substance* of each one of our existing clauses was discussed and taught, and referred to its own Scriptural authority. Therefore we will allow ourselves the help of following the wording of our own Baptismal Creed, without entering into complicated questions of chronology and history that lie wholly outside our range.

Dost thou believe in God? First of all our Baptismal candidate is confronted with a question to which his answer will be strong and unhesitating: "Dost thou believe in God . . ."? Nor will he hesitate even if it is put to him in the form in which it stands in the Jerusalem Creed: "Dost thou believe in *One* God?" Has he not been brought

up from childhood to repeat the words, "The Lord our God is one Lord"? And yet few readers of the Psalms can have failed to notice in them passages which seem to acknowledge the existence of "other gods," the "gods of the heathen," even while they affirm that there is none like unto their own Lord God (86, 8), whom they know assuredly to be a "great King above all gods" (95, 3). Such allusions are fairly frequent, and witness to a time when the belief in "other gods"—inferior, indeed, to Jehovah, and to be looked on as his vassals, yet having a real existence and power of their own—was still a living thing; and long after this belief had ceased to be living, and even in those later days when experience of the idol-worship of Babylonia had once and for ever made such a belief as impossible to the Jew as it is to the Christian (cp. 115, 2-8), the familiar literary form still prevailed.

Have we ever thought how noble and how rich is the conception of God furnished by the mere names and titles applied to him in the Psalter—Rock, Strength, Almighty, Strong Tower, Most High, Lord God of Hosts, Shield, Sun, Defender, and many more? But three names only need detain us here, just those three that in their Greek equivalents find a place in the Creed of our new-made Christian, no less than in the ancient Hymn-Book of his own Church—ALMIGHTY, GOD, LORD.

The title "Almighty" is, it is true, not so familiar to our Jewish convert as it is to ourselves—unless, indeed, he knows it through its use in the Book of Job; elsewhere in the Old Testament it is rarer than we, who associate it with the opening of our most solemn acts of faith and prayer, are apt to suppose. In the whole of the Psalter it occurs twice only: once where it speaks of "the Almighty scattering kings" for the defence of his people (68, 14), and again where it shows the surest abiding-place of God's people to be

"under the shadow of the Almighty" (91, 1). But if the particular *word* is rarely used, the *thought* of God's all-sovereign power dominates the Psalter from end to end, and concerning his majesty, his omniscience, his justice, his transcendent glory, our catechumen had little to learn.

If however the title "Almighty" is but of rare occurrence in the Psalter, the titles *God* and *Lord*, either one or both of them, are to be found in every single Psalm. The Hebrew word that most commonly represents our English word "God" is *Elohim*, and, without being in the very least Hebrew scholars, it is well for us to become familiar with this word, as we are already familiar with that other Hebrew word for "God," *Jehovah*. We must all of us have noticed in reading certain Psalms that the word "God" is occasionally used in a sense that puzzles us. Sometimes it seems to refer to men, sometimes to angels, sometimes to the gods of the heathen, and we even find the perplexity meeting us again in the New Testament where certain Psalms happen to be quoted. For example, our ear is so familiar, both in the Prayer-Book and in the New Testament, with the words, "Thou madest him lower than the *angels*" (Ps. 8, 5; Heb. 2, 7), that it is startling to us to read in the Revised Version of the 8th Psalm, "Thou madest him a little lower than *God*." Yet the word does admit of either translation, and it was probably only a feeling of reverence that caused both Greek and English translators in this particular instance to use the word "angels" instead of "God." Sometimes *Elohim* seems to refer to earthly judges—unjust and wicked judges, even—on whom, unworthy though they be, the great name of God was bestowed (cp. Ps. 82, 1, 6, and John 10, 34).

In each case where the use in the Psalms of the word "God" or "gods" raises a difficulty a commentary should be consulted; but the general explanation seems to be that

this word *Elohim*, together with the kindred word *El* found in some of the Psalms, contains the idea of *might* and *strength*, and so was applied in many different connexions, human, angelic, Divine, until gradually the highest conception of the word banished the lower applications of it, and took possession of the Jewish mind. As poetical archaisms, the lower applications to the "gods of the heathen," or to angels, or to judges, still lingered on; but, speaking broadly, the word *Elohim*, as used in the Book of Psalms, stands as the equivalent of our English word God.

Still, as we know, the characteristic title used in the Psalms is not "God," but LORD. The very way in which the word is printed attracts our attention, and reminds us that it is in some way different from the same word printed in ordinary type, as if to show that it carries more dignity than belongs to any earthly lord or master. We all more or less know the explanation, and how the Jews used this lower word "Lord" to represent the sacred name of Jehovah, the personal name by which the God of Israel was known to the nations around. We have heard, perhaps, of the curious device by which they took the four consonants of that ancient name, and the requisite vowels from the word "Adonai" (Lord), and made, as it were, a *symbol*, that should screen from profane use the unspeakable name of Jehovah, and yet keep it ever in mind. But if we ask what was the meaning of this mysterious word "Jehovah" (or, as it is now often written, "Yahve" or "Jahveh"), we shall find that no certain answer can be given. Two explanations we can see for ourselves: one in Genesis (21, 33), where it is said that "Abraham called on the name of Jehovah, the everlasting God"; and another in Exodus (3, 15), where, as the marginal notes show, the name Jehovah is traced to the same origin as the words "I am" or "I will be" in verse 14. In both these passages we get

the thought of God's constancy and unchangeableness, and there is a strong body of scholarly opinion, upholding the belief of many generations both of Jews and of Christians, that the fundamental idea underlying the name Jehovah is just this—the *Eternity* of God. Matthew Arnold sums up the matter in popular form when, in speaking of English translations of the Bible, he says¹ “To substitute Jehovah or Jahve for *the Lord* destroys powerful and deeply established sentiments. *The Eternal* is in itself a better equivalent than Jehovah. It is adopted in one of the French versions, and in many of the familiar texts which a man has present to his mind, and habitually dwells upon, he will do well to adopt it. He will find that it gives to the text a fuller and deeper significance; but there are others to which *the Lord* lends itself better.”

Another link in the chain that established the substitution of the more general word LORD for the personal name Jehovah, was its adoption in the Septuagint Translation, where Jehovah is uniformly represented by *Kurios*. But the underlying name was never lost sight of, so that to both Hebrew and Greek, as now to ourselves, the word LORD was perfectly well understood to represent the Name of the Holy One of Israel, the Great King over all the earth.

God the Father Almighty. The Christian begins his Creed with the comforting assurance that he has in Almighty God an all-perfect *Father*. Was this thought of the Fatherhood of God familiar to the Jewish believer as it is, thank God, to every Christian child? or is this yet another of the unrecognized blessings brought to light by the gospel of our Saviour? As we turn our minds back upon the Old Testament we recall passages such as the question in Deuteronomy: “O foolish people, is not he thy father that hath bought thee?” (32, 6); or Isaiah's: “Thou art our father”

¹ *Isaiah of Jerusalem.*

(63, 16); or Malachi's: "If then I be a father, where is mine honour?" (1, 6). But scholars tell us that such passages have reference to God rather as the "Father of his people," as it says in the first quotation, than as the Heavenly Father of each separate child that he has made. But is this true also of those verses in the Psalms which speak of the fatherliness of God's care for the weak and the needy, the desolate and the faulty? Opinion is divided. Some scholars hold that even here the conception is limited to God as the Father of the nation, but it is difficult not to see a more individual and intimate relation in such a phrase as: "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows" (68, 5). It is still more difficult not to see it in the tenderness of the 103rd Psalm: "Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (103, 13). When we look at this Psalm as a whole, we find in it all that goes to make up our ideal of the Divine Fatherhood; and in whatever sense the first writer may have intended the words, they must through constant use have grown so large and rich in meaning as to prepare many a true-hearted Israelite for the fulness of our Lord's teaching concerning the Heavenly Father. How can we fail to think of this Psalm as the bridge that carried our catechumen over from the Old Testament to the New, and made it easy for him to declare, "I believe in God the *Father* Almighty"?

Maker of Heaven and Earth. Here is no new doctrine for one brought up from childhood on the teaching of the Psalms, for nowhere else could he find more richly set forth the full meaning of the creative and sustaining power of God.

The poet Wordsworth, in one of his letters, has an interesting and vehement outburst against the dangerous tendency he perceives in religious education to limit the Divine part in the universe to a "bare act of making." He protests against the "injurious use that is made of Holy Scripture

by perpetually talking about *making by God*," and he disclaims hotly any belief that the "Supreme Being bears the same relation to the universe as a watchmaker bears to a watch." So far he has not advanced beyond the plain statement of the Elizabethan *Book of Homilies*, which thus safeguards the meaning of the words: "It is not to be thought that God hath created all this whole universal world, and thus once made, taketh no more care of it. Nay, he still preserveth it by his goodness; he still stayeth it in his creation." After this, however, Wordsworth, leaving argument on one side, teaches in poet's language what we should call in present-day parlance "the doctrine of the Divine Immanence"—teaching it in true Wordsworthian fashion, by recounting his answers to the questions of his four-year-old child. "How did God make me?" "Where is God?" "How does he speak?" "I told him," continues Wordsworth, "that God was a spirit—that he was not like his flesh, which he could touch, but more like the thoughts in his mind, which he could not touch. The wind was tossing the fir-trees, and the sky and light were dancing about in their dark branches as seen through the window. Noting their fluctuations, he exclaimed eagerly, 'There is a bit of Him! I see it there!'" The poet goes on to explain that this is meant for "something more than father's prattle," and ends as he began: "For Heaven's sake, in your religious talk with children, say as little as possible about making."

But the danger which Wordsworth so much feared, the error which he thus opposes, would have been impossible to one steeped from childhood in Psalms such as the 104th—to take only a single example that might be abundantly multiplied. There first we meet the little child's thought of God "walking upon the wings of the wind," and "making winds his messengers, and his ministers a flaming fire"

(104, 3, 4). There, too, we are shown the sustaining care that provides food and drink for the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and no less for the man, whose labour must co-operate with God's gifts, whose very existence is dependent, as that of all other created things, on the quickening breath of God: "Thou takest away their breath, they die. . . . Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground" (104, 29, 30). To the Hebrew Psalmists "Creation" is not something done once for all; it is an eternal activity of the Divine Creator, watching over the world that he has made. And so plainly and unmistakably is this set forth in Psalm after Psalm (*e.g.*, 145, 65, 33, 29) that there is much to be said for the plea that is sometimes urged, that our children would be likely to get larger and truer thoughts concerning God as the "Maker of heaven and earth" if their earliest teaching were drawn from the Psalms, and the Genesis story of the six days of Creation taught them at a somewhat later stage.

Yet while the Psalms are always unconsciously bringing home to us afresh the sense of God's presence in Nature, they are never for a moment in danger of identifying God with the works of his hands, or of falling into the pantheistic doctrine that "God is everything and everything is God." Throughout the whole Psalter the distinction is unmistakably made clear. The "voice of the Lord" is on the waters and in the thunder; it is in the storm and in the earthquake; but it is the voice of One far beyond and above all earthly limitations, the voice of One who "sat as king at the Flood"—yea, of One who "sitteth as king for ever" (29, 10).

Nowhere in the Old Testament—not even in Isaiah—is the *transcendancy* of God more forcibly proclaimed than in the Psalms; nowhere is the vast interval between him and his creatures more felt. He is "decked with light as with a garment"; he is "clothed with majesty and honour"

(104, 1, 2). His glory is "above the heavens" even as it is above the earth, and it is as much an act of condescension, "a humbling of himself," to have regard to the one as to the other (113, 4-6). "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that hath he done" (135, 6), but—"all his work is done in faithfulness," for "the word of the Lord is right" (33, 4). By that same word of *rightness* and of *power* were the heavens made—"He spake, and it was done" (33, 6, 9); and surely we shall not be wrong in believing that the witness of the Hebrew Psalms concerning the righteous and creative and sustaining power of the Divine "Word" was one of the many paths by which God's ancient people were prepared for the Johannine teaching of the Incarnate Word, "*by whom,*" as the Creed of Jerusalem early proclaimed, "*all things were made.*"

CHAPTER XI^B

THE CREED IN THE PSALTER—(*continued*)

(*I believe in an Anointed Son*)

UP to this point our Baptismal candidate will have found nothing demanded of him to which he could not give a full and ready assent from out of the teaching of his childhood's faith. But now there comes a question of a wholly different order, which forces him to pause and consider and make distinctions in his mind.

Dost thou believe in Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son, our Lord? So runs the great challenge. Let him but turn his thoughts away from the opening and the closing words of the clause "*Dost thou believe in Jesus . . . our Lord?*" and then the central portion suggests to him ideas, vague it may be, but already perfectly familiar, through the Psalms and histories and prophetic writings of his old faith.

Christ! That is, "the Anointed"—or, in the sacred language of his race, "the Messiah." Yes, even "a son of God" in human form. Was not David, the Anointed of the Lord (89, 20), privileged to be so called? "I will be his father, and he shall be my son." So said the great promise (2 Sam. 7, 14); and did not that promise go echoing on through succeeding generations, when David had been long dead? Did not the very witness of the Psalms keep it in all men's memory as a still unexhausted relationship? "He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father" (89, 26); and then the Divine promise rings out afresh, glorified anew: "I also

will make him my first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth (89, 27). Again, there are the words of the 2nd Psalm concerning the king, the Lord's anointed: "I will tell of the decree: The Lord said unto me, Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee (2, 7). Or we may turn to that other mysterious picture of God's anointed, the everlasting warrior-priest, "after the order of Melchizedek," leading forth his conquering hosts (110, 3-6).

But it may be that some readers are wearying of this long digression, and are feeling impatiently: "Why, of course! These quotations are all taken from the *Messianic Psalms*, and naturally a Jewish catechumen would travel to Christianity along this road."

Again we must make a pause, and ask ourselves what exact meaning we attach to this familiar phrase, "The Messianic Psalms." It is a familiar phrase to us Christians; before Christianity dawned it was already familiar to Jewish scholars and to Jewish patriots, but what did it mean on Jewish lips, and what does it mean on Christian lips? Has it for both one and the same signification? Has it for both one and the same goal? The moment we begin to ask ourselves such questions, other questions come crowding upon us. Yet this need not discourage us, for however imperfectly we may answer them, we shall at least enter farther into the depths of the Psalter than we did before we saw that there were questions to be asked.

Two discoveries we can hardly fail to make for ourselves: first, that there is no cut-and-dried answer to the question, "What exactly is meant by the Messianic Psalms?" and secondly, that there does exist a strong bond of agreement between the ancient Jewish interpretation of these Psalms and the Christian interpretation, though, of course, much that for the Jew still lies awaiting the future is for the Christian already fulfilled.

Shall we now try to clear our thoughts on this great matter by looking at the list of those Psalms that are distinctly classed as "Messianic"? Unfortunately, there is no such authoritative list to be found, either among Jewish or Christian scholars, and what lists there are, whether ancient or modern, vary considerably among themselves. Some would include twenty Psalms, or even more; about half a dozen, by common consent, find their place in most lists; but some scholars would include a far larger number, while one extreme rigorist has pronounced that, strictly speaking, the only truly Messianic Psalm is the 110th.¹ We can get no help, therefore, in this direction, and must try yet another path. Shall we get any nearer to a definition by taking those Psalms in which there occurs the word "Anointed"? At least we shall be guided to a group of Psalms in which we find mention of a *king*: sometimes David, sometimes an unknown king.

For example, "I have found David, my servant: with my holy oil have I anointed him (89, 20; cp. 132, 10, 17); or again, the Royal Bridegroom riding forth victorious, "anointed with the oil of gladness" (45, 3-7); or the Kingly Son, the Anointed One, seated upon Mount Zion to execute judgment on all who oppose his rule (2, 2, 7-9). We see plainly that in all these instances the thought of the Messiah is associated with the thought of an Anointed King. We have advanced a step, but our method is too mechanical to take us far. It is not sufficient to trace out one particular word. In some of the Psalms that have from early days been accounted "Messianic" the word "anointed" is not found, but we have an ideal picture of a prosperous people under the rule of an ideal King, so just

¹ Delitzsch, who based this claim on the definition that a Messianic Psalm must "contain prophecy immediately pointing to the person of a coming Anointed One, who was fully to set up God's kingdom on earth."

and so beloved that the memory of his name shall be "continued as long as the sun" (72, 17). Not even in that 110th Psalm, which the scholar mentioned above considers the one true Messianic Psalm, does the actual word "anointed" occur; only in it there stands out for all time the image of the Priest-leader—doubly anointed, as priest and as King.

Generation succeeded generation, and the very familiarity of the Psalms, their intimate association with past history, made them an increasingly precious portion of the national heritage. But with this there was an ever-growing sense of disappointment. The noble words remained unchanged—yet unfulfilled. The promises had been to David, and David was dead. Their continuance had been assured to his descendants "for ever," and that by a Divine oath: "I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie unto David" (89, 35). Yet that covenant held no longer, and never had the peaceful glories of the 72nd Psalm reached to the full vision caught for a moment by some poet at the best moment of Solomon's reign. Neither then nor afterwards had there been seen upon earth that free and glad union between a willing and thankful people and a king perfect in righteousness as in strength (72, 11–15).

Then it was, when the sense of disappointment was silently working in men's minds, that there began that long, unconscious process of the transferring of their old hopes into a new and dimly seen future—and the vessels in which they carried over these precious hopes were the old promises and images of their sacred writings, and not least among them the promises and images of the Psalter. Out of such material was slowly refashioned that deep-seated Jewish belief in a Coming Deliverer, mighty to restore, and to heal, and to perfect, which we speak of as the "Messianic Hope." As the Chosen People read and chanted and pondered the words

of Lawgiver and Prophet and Poet, a conviction began to grow up in many different minds that the force of these various passages was not exhausted. Detached verses were brought into new combinations, and suggested thrilling hopes for an unknown future, that might lie in the far-off distance or might even now be at the doors. In the striking words of a great theologian:¹ "A Figure was created—projected, as it were, upon the clouds—which was invested with all the attributes of a person. And the minds of men were turned towards it in an attitude of expectation." Something of this "attitude of expectation" we can see for ourselves in the Gospels, in those broken sentences, those unanswered questions, which make it clear that the possibility of a sudden appearance of a "Christ," of uncertain origin and aspect, yet clothed in human form, was a deep-seated influence in the background of Jewish thought. We need only recall three passages in S. John's Gospel: S. Andrew's "We have found the Messiah" (1, 41); the Samaritan woman's question, "Can this be the Christ?" (4, 29); the discussions in Jerusalem concerning the claims of a Messiah, whose origin, instead of being full of mystery, was known to all men (7, 26, 27). Or again we may recall in S. Matthew's Gospel the solemn adjuration of Caiaphas, "Tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (26, 63), and we shall surely be convinced that the Jewish Christian had already been prepared by Psalmist and poet for a general confession of belief in a "Christ" who should be in some especial sense "*a son of God.*"

But this is not the complete clause as it stands in the Baptismal Creed. Let us now turn to the opening and closing words of that clause, which we have so far set on one side—"Jesus . . . our Lord," and then let us consider afresh

¹ Dr. Sanday in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. iv., art. "Son of God."

how tremendous a confession our catechumen is now asked to make—a confession as new and complete as that of S. Peter at Cæsarea Philippi (Matt. 16, 15, 16), and one for which the Jewish Psalms have in no wise prepared him. The word “Lord” was for him most intimately associated with the “glorious and fearful Name” (Deut. 28, 58) of God himself. Therefore, to link that great title with the name *Jesus*, “the private and personal name”¹ of the Prophet of Nazareth, to take this step was to cross unmistakably the dividing-line between Jew and Christian. Well might S. Paul write concerning all such converts as these: “No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12, 3).

On the succeeding questions in the Creed relating to the Incarnation we shall not expect to find much light thrown from the Book of Psalms. How little direct preparation they afforded for a belief in the Holy Nativity of the Saviour may be seen by studying the six Psalms used in our Church for three hundred years upon Christmas Day. Four of the number (45, 89, 110, 132) turn our thoughts to the Anointed Son, to the royal or priestly conqueror. The 85th describes the blessedness of a nation restored to peace under a perfect rule. The 19th is chosen with reference to the Creative Word, whose work is seen, alike in the glories of the heavens and in the perfection of the Law. But in none of the six is there anything that could prepare the mind for the story of Bethlehem. One Psalm, indeed, there is that might have served this purpose—that inexhaustible 8th Psalm, which sets forth both the greatness and the littleness of man: “Thou hast made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honour” (8, 5). The Epistle to the Hebrews (2, 6–9) has made the application of the words so plain for Christians that now it has almost become diffi-

¹ Nairne, *Epistle of Priesthood*.

cult to think of them solely in their primary sense, and we may reasonably suppose that this particular Psalm may have "opened the mind" of our Jewish catechumen for a fuller understanding of the Christian "mystery" of the Incarnation.

He suffered. "Dost thou believe," our Baptismal candidate is now asked, "that he was conceived by the Holy Ghost: born of the Virgin Mary; that he *suffered* under Pontius Pilate?" Most of this will be wholly new and difficult teaching for him to receive, and yet there is one word in it that may help him to join together his old faith and the new: "*He suffered*"; Messiah suffered! His countrymen in general in their picture of the Christ had, it is true, looked chiefly to those passages of Scripture that spoke of a royal and triumphant Christ; and yet there was that 89th Psalm, that spoke of the "anointed of the Lord" as rejected and brought to shame, as having failed in his purpose (89, 38-41). But perhaps that was through human fault, through human faithlessness? And yet there were other Psalms that seemed to prove that God's servants were not exempted from suffering, by reason of their faithfulness to him. There were so many cries of the innocent and upright sufferer: "They hate me without a cause"; "For thy sake I have borne reproach" (69, 4, 7, 9); "They reward me evil for good" (35, 12); above all, that bitter cry of the unknown sufferer of old: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (22, 1).

Let us return for a moment to Dr. Sanday's image of the "Ideal Figure projected, as it were, upon the clouds"—"a Figure whose lines were drawn," as he says, "from many different originals"; built up from widely scattered passages of Scripture, yet "meeting at last in a single portraiture"; and among these "converging lines" were all these passages—overlooked by the many, yet treasured

by the few, that make suffering, for the sake of God or of man, one of the marks of God's chosen servants. "For thy sake have I borne reproach. Let not those that seek thee be brought to dishonour through me, O God of Israel" (69, 7, 6).

The connexion between the Righteous Sufferer and the Lord's Anointed is not brought out as clearly in the Psalms as in the writings of some of the Prophets (cp. Dan. 9, 25, 26); yet it was to the Psalms, as well as to the Law and the Prophets, that the Lord made appeal on the evening of the first Easter, when he was opening the minds of his disciples to the necessity that Christ should suffer pain before he entered into his glory (S. Luke 24, 44-46, 26). And the more his disciples have studied the Psalms, the more have they found in them a witness to the one Sinless Sufferer, the one perfect Servant of God.

He was crucified.—Here is the stumbling-block of Jews, the foolishness of Greeks (1 Cor. 1, 23). Can our Hebrew convert support this belief also out of the Hymn-Book of his Church? The Christians—especially the Greek-speaking Christians—would have said that he could so support it, and would have quoted the Greek versions of Psalm 96, 10, "The Lord hath reigned from the tree," as a clear reference to the Crucifixion (cp. Acts 10, 39; 1 Pet. 2, 24). The translation, however, has long been shown to depend on a mistaken reading of the Hebrew text, and is rightly given in our Bible version: "Say among the nations, The Lord reigneth." The memory, however, of the old beautiful mistake is still kept alive by the familiar rendering of the Latin Passion-tide hymn:

"How God the heathen's King should be;
For God is reigning from the Tree."

But one Psalm there is beyond all the rest which has for nearly 1,900 years been associated with the thought of Good

Friday—primarily by our Saviour's own use of it upon the Cross, then by its use in the services of the day, from before the time of S. Augustine. Of the 22nd Psalm it has been daringly said that: "It seems to the Christian that the Psalmist, indeed, gives a more vivid description of the sufferings of Christ than the authors of the Gospels,"¹ and it is not hard to feel that this ideal picture of One whose trust in his God no suffering nor loneliness could shake, must have prepared the heart of many an Israelite to recognize in the crucified Jesus the perfect Servant of God, who was likewise the Saviour of man.

And then there is that other Psalm—not, indeed, chosen for the services of Good Friday, yet for ever consecrated to that day by our Lord's use of it upon the Cross. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" (31, 5). So wrote the unknown Psalmist, but the words were transfigured and raised to a higher power when our Lord took them upon his lips and said: "*Father*, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23, 46).

Dead, buried. Let us for a little while longer continue to follow the guidance of the Good Friday Psalms. The 40th goes a step beyond the 22nd in showing not only the absolute trust of the patient sufferer, but also his joyful surrender of himself to do God's will (vv. 6-8). The 69th Psalm is twice cited by our Lord (69, 9, 4): once as a witness to his only holy zeal for his Father's house (John 2, 17); once as expressing the popular hatred against himself (John 15, 25). It is one of the great Psalms of the Passion, but we have only to read the confessions of sin which it contains (v. 5), or to contrast the Psalmist's imprecations against his pitiless adversaries (vv. 22-28) with our Lord's prayer upon the Cross, to see how partial and imperfect a likeness it is.

The last of the Good Friday Psalms is universally allowed

¹ Briggs.

to be the saddest in the whole Psalter (Ps. 88). Its choice for use on this day may have been in part influenced by the last verse: "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me" (cp. John 16, 32); still more by the agony of loneliness which fills the Psalm from end to end, showing us, as it does, the long battle of the loyal soul, but hiding from us the final victory that yet is made sure by the pledge of the forsaken one's unceasing prayer for help (vv. 1, 2, 9, 13). But here, again, we feel that this exceeding bitter cry can have only a very limited application to our Lord.

He went down into Hell. This 88th Psalm, in its whole sorrowful outpouring, helps us to understand something of the thoughts of the writer and of his contemporaries concerning Death and the unknown world beyond.

The Jew did not speak of "descending into Hades," but he used the almost exact equivalent when he spoke of "drawing nigh unto Sheol" and of "going down to the pit" (vv. 3, 4). This Psalm brings home to us more vividly than does any other what "the terrors of death" (55, 4) meant to even the most pious of Jews. We see that this same dread thought of "the cords of death and the pains of Sheol" is present in late Psalms (*e.g.*, 116, 3) no less than in early ones, and that while the words Resurrection and Immortality are all unknown, the words Death and Grave meet us continually. What, then, can we gather about the Jewish belief in Sheol? First of all it is a place where *God is not*; where his hand no longer upholds and shields, where a man is "cut off" (88, 16) from God's remembrance. It is a land where all things are forgotten (88, 12, P.B.V.), and the perpetual prisoners who are laid in that "lowest pit," that inner cell of deep darkness, forgotten alike by God and by man, are as men that have no escape from the terrors that sweep over them like the breakers of the sea (vv. 6-8), where

the old happy communion with God is broken (6, 5). Can they, indeed, claim the name of *men*? Are they not mere ghosts, living a maimed, shadowy life (cp. Isa. 14, 9, 10), too weak to rise up and offer service to the God to whom some at least among them still remain constant, even though they have faded out of his remembrance (vv. 11-14)?

Other Psalms and other Scripture passages fill up the mournful picture. In Sheol there is no distinction of good and evil, and generation after generation passes down into this hidden world of "thick darkness," this "land without any order" (Job 10, 22). They are driven in like sheep, with Death for their Shepherd (49, 14), and though the *thought* of God is present to them, yet they can hold no solemn services of praise and thanksgiving as in the days of the earthly life (30, 9; 115, 17).

We know quite well that these outpourings of hopelessness and misery are not the highest utterances of the Psalms, concerning the life after death. We know that ultimately the faith of the spiritually-minded Jew rose high above his fears, and that it was from some of these very Psalms that his faith drew its inspiration. Of this more hopeful outlook we shall speak presently, but meantime we shall do well to remember that often in the darkest and most desponding of the Psalms we find a noble inconsistency, showing that though the writer's thoughts were inevitably moulded by the traditional conceptions of Death and the unknown hereafter, yet his instinct of faith in better things provided for him by a just and righteous God again and again asserts itself in the face of the intellectual beliefs of his age and upbringing. Thus, the author of that all but despairing 88th Psalm declares that God has cast him off, and remembers him no more (vv. 5 and 14), yet even while he says this he unconsciously contradicts his own words by the witness of his unbroken and expectant prayer: "Unto

thee," saith he, "I cry for help, and in the morning my prayer goes to meet thee" (v. 13).¹

Nevertheless, the weight of the old dread beliefs could never be wholly cast aside until a living Voice had made itself heard from the far side of Death, and until men had learned to confess as "Lord" a fellow-man who had descended into Hell—"gone down into Sheol," as the Jew would have expressed it—and had thence risen up in glorious fulness of life and power.

And dost thou believe that he did rise again? Have the Psalms prepared our catechumen to answer this question also? If his thoughts are following the same lines as S. Peter's upon the Day of Pentecost, he will assuredly bring forward the glorious confidence of the 16th Psalm: "Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see the pit" (v. 10)—a Psalm which, unfortunately, finds no place in our actual Easter services, though formerly it preluded them, in the antiphon appointed for Easter Even.

We know how unhesitatingly both S. Peter (Acts 2, 27, 31) and afterwards S. Paul (Acts 13, 35–37) apply these words to our Lord's resurrection, and how S. Peter claims them as a conscious and direct prophecy of that event, uttered by David himself (Acts 2, 22–31). The question of the Davidic authorship has been discussed elsewhere (Chapter VI.), but what we have now to make clear to ourselves is whether this particular Psalm, by reason of the interpretation given to it by the two leading Apostles, is to be regarded as standing on a different level from other like passages of the Old Testament. Are we, in fact, to suppose S. Peter to mean that the writer of this 16th Psalm—be he David or some other—saw opened before him, as in a vision, the death and resurrection of the

¹ Briggs's translation.

Saviour ? And if so, what shall we say of S. John's words concerning Isaiah's witness to the Christ—"These things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory ; and he spake of him" (John 12, 41).

Perhaps the truest answer is that the first preachers of Christianity were themselves so full of Christ that they found him everywhere, and not least in the ancient writings which they knew so intimately ; and that when once the eyes of their mind had been opened by their risen Lord to understand the Scriptures, they were constantly discovering him afresh in every book of the Old Testament, as each familiar phrase or name or incident shone forth, illuminated by a new light.

And yet to many of us these interpretations seem forced and unreal. They seem to be reading a meaning of their own into the old words instead of drawing out what those words actually meant, and it may be that some of us have an uneasy feeling that our eyes too are "holden," so that we cannot see as we ought to see, and we wonder within ourselves whether our Master would have found us very dull scholars on that walk to Emmaus.

Let us see if we cannot find consolation and guidance in other words of S. Peter's (1 Pet. 1, 10-12), where he writes of "the spirit of Christ" working in the prophets of old, and pointing them forward to understand the meaning and the time of words which told of the sufferings that must needs come upon the Messiah, and of the glories that should follow. And we ourselves, who week by week declare our belief in that Holy Spirit "who spake by the prophets"—are we then, standing so very far distant from the belief of S. Peter and S. John and S. Paul ? Or are we rather like people looking at the same things from a different standpoint and through a different medium, and expressing what we see in somewhat different language ?

Our generation has been trained to make careful distinctions between "direct prophecies," and the most striking and apposite of "applications" of words that in their origin had another and a definite meaning of their own. We have been trained to seek first for the original occasion and purpose of the words, however fully we may recognize the higher fitness of some later application of them.

We, for example, ask: "What did this 16th Psalm mean to the man who wrote it, and to those who first read it?" Was it, as some think, nothing more than the prayer of one who put his whole trust in God—a prayer charged with a strong confidence—that he who offered it should be saved at that moment from bodily death? Or was it, as many think, an early utterance of "the larger hope"? Thus we endeavour to put ourselves back in the position of that unknown, far away poet; but the first messengers of Christianity were content simply to take up the ancient words as vehicles for the new thoughts that were flooding their minds.

Hitherto there had been nothing in human experience to answer to the claim: "Thou wilt not suffer thy holy one to see corruption" (16, 10). These great words, and others like them, had remained for centuries *beyond all human experience*, but now at last words and experience were worthily matched. Fulfilment had come, and it was utterly impossible for men filled with the new wine of the Pentecostal Spirit to put themselves back at the standpoint of those "diligent searchers," of whom S. Peter speaks, who were dimly groping towards the grace that was one day to be revealed. Only, the Apostles saw—as by a flash of light—what we are always discovering by slow degrees, that through these imperfect and half-understood teachings of the Old Testament "the spirit of Christ" was testifying to things not seen as yet. And what but this very same truth do

we confess when we speak of "the Inspiration of the Bible," and thus affirm our belief in the inbreathed Spirit of God speaking through human channels?

But to return to the question how far the Psalms prepared the way for a belief in our Lord's resurrection. Let us glance at the proper Psalms for Easter Day. The grievous loss of the 16th Psalm will no doubt be made good at no very distant date. The six Psalms that for more than three centuries have held their place in our Easter services do, all of them, serve as channels for the manifold thoughts of praise and gladness that belong to the day; but with the exception of the Easter-like verses in the 118th Psalm—"I shall not die, but live. . . . The Lord hath not given me over unto death" (see vv. 17-24)—they have not the same striking and direct appropriateness as the Good Friday Psalms. These Easter Day Psalms seem rather to belong to that great class of "prophecies" of which it has been said: "The fact of the resurrection has given them a new meaning. They would not of themselves have suggested the resurrection, but were incomplete without it."¹

He ascended into heaven. Here, again, a whole wealth of fresh thought is poured into old words. S. Paul, when he would teach his newly made converts the glory and the bounty of the ascended Christ, takes them back to the Psalmist's picture of the triumphal procession of the heavenly King (68, 18). It is this same image of the victorious King, returning to his throne, that meets us in two of the special Psalms chosen for Ascension Day (24, 7-10; 47, 5, 6), but in the 8th Psalm the thought is different. Here we have set before us the exaltation of Man—so little and yet so great; so weak, and yet "crowned with glory and honour" (vv. 4 and 5); while the 15th Psalm—one of the so-called *quest Psalms*²—depicts the character of

¹ E. H. Plumptre.

² Cp. 11, 7; 23, 5, 6; 27, 4-6.

one so true in heart that he is counted worthy to go up into the mount of the Lord, and be welcomed as God's guest.

And sitteth at the right hand of God. And where, save "at the right hand of God" should the Messiah sit? The 110th Psalm, on which this clause is based, is, as we have already seen (p. 153), very generally regarded as the most distinctively "Messianic Psalm" in the entire Psalter—a poet's vision of the as yet unrealized "Christ" who should one day take his great power and reign at the right hand of Jehovah (110, 1). Be this as it may, the opening words of this Psalm laid deep hold upon the imagination of the Jewish people, and were graven deeply on their memory, as we may see by their repeated use in the New Testament (*e.g.*, Matt. 22, 44; Acts 2, 34; Eph. 1, 20; Heb. 8, 1). When once our catechumen had confessed that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12, 3), he no longer questioned the strength of his claim to "sit down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1, 3).

And from thence shall come again at the end of the world, to judge the quick and the dead. The thought of a Divine judgment of the world stands out plainly enough in the Book of Psalms. We need only recall our evening canticle, "The Lord cometh to judge the earth" (98, 9), or think of the 50th Psalm, with its majestic summons to God's court of judgment (v. 4). Most assuredly the Psalms are always expecting a "coming" of God to judgment; yet the thought is not quite that of the Creed. It is not the thought of such a "coming again" of One already known upon earth, as that which those "men of Galilee" were bidden to expect (Acts 1, 10, 11). It is not the thought of a *return*, but rather of such a "coming" as had never yet been witnessed upon earth, when God should "shine forth" from Zion in awful majesty (50, 2, 3); when he should "awake" to judgment (7, 6),

and "rise up, to save all the meek upon earth" (76, 9). But there was also the joyous side of this "coming," which should usher in for the godly a new order of peace and justice upon this troubled world (*e.g.*, 96, 10-13; 98, 8, 9); and very much, perhaps, as we look for the Second Coming and "the restoration of all things" (Acts 3, 21), so the pious Israelite "looked" for this manifestation of God, watching the signs of the times; sometimes deeming it close at hand, sometimes—nay, often—crying out: "How long, O Lord, wilt thou hide thyself?" (89, 46; cp. 13, 1, 2; 79, 5).

But in the Psalms the expectation is always of a judgment coming to those who are living their accustomed lives in this "stablished world" of the familiar upper earth (96, 10), whereas our Creed speaks of a judgment that extends to "quick and dead" alike. This is a thought that has no place at all in the Psalms, for, as we have already seen, nor good nor ill could reach to those imprisoned beings in the shadowy life of Sheol, unless first they had been rescued thence. Not yet had the devout Jew attained to the faith that all men, wherever they may be, are still "living unto God" (Luke 20, 38).

CHAPTER XIc

THE CREED IN THE PSALTER—(*continued*)

(I believe in the Holy Spirit of God)

And dost thou believe in the Holy Ghost? If our catechumens were asked whether he believed in God's "good Spirit" (143, 10)—that creative, holy, guiding Spirit—his answer would unmistakably be in the affirmative. It is unlikely that he thought of this holy Spirit as in any way distinct from God the Father, but he so thought of him as the power and the influence of God, as to be well fitted to receive the fuller Christian teaching concerning his Person and office.

Two of the Special Psalms chosen for Pentecost (*e.g.*, 104, 145) bring out very clearly one aspect of the Spirit's work—his creative and sustaining energies as shown in the world of Nature. Other Psalms show him in his God-appointed relation to Man. That omnipresent Spirit watches over men in all states and places—in the dark under-world no less than in the heaven overhead or in the depths of the sea (139, 7–10); he refreshes their weary souls; he "leads them into the land of uprightness" (143, 10); and—more marvellous by far—this "princely¹ Spirit" of God does not desert the frail human spirit when it has fallen

¹ In the R.V. rendered "free" or "willing." The translation "princely" originated in the Greek version, and was thence carried on into the Latin. It has never quite lost its hold, and is still favoured by some modern commentators, as giving very felicitously the Psalmist's thought of the "leadership" of this guiding Spirit (Ps. 51, 12). See Briggs on Ps. 51, 12.

into sin, but imparts to it something of his own pure nature. This "holy spirit" cleanses the heart of the troubled sinner; it upholds him in his weakness, and even restores to him his lost joy (51, 10-12).

The Holy Catholick Church: the Communion of Saints.

Can these two clauses, which seem so wholly bound up with the Christian faith—can they also, in God's manifold wisdom, have been slowly prepared for our use, through the Hymn-Book of the Jewish Church?

The actual word "Saints" is found, as we well know, in the English translations of many of the Psalms. Of this we shall speak presently. The word "Church," on the other hand, seems but tamely represented by either "Congregation" or "Assembly"—renderings which do duty interchangeably for two distinct Hebrew words, and which range through most varied applications, from the Assemblies of the *angels*, over which God himself presides (e.g., 89, 7), to the Assemblies or "Congregations" of evil-doers (22, 16). Their most frequent use, however, is connected with *the gathering of the whole community for purposes of worship* (e.g., 35, 18; 40, 9, 10; 107, 32).

In the famous Septuagint translation the two Hebrew words are represented by equivalents very familiar in English ears—*Synagogue* and *Ecclesia*, and, in course of time, in the hands of the New Testament writers, the one word *Ecclesia*, standing alone, came to represent all that we now mean by "Church." We have seen above that the original Hebrew words that are translated in the English Psalter "Congregation" and "Assembly" are sometimes used on a very high level and sometimes on a very low one, and we also find that sometimes they serve to indicate one particular localized gathering or congregation; at other times they rise to the ideal conception of the whole people of God. Such a prayer as this: "Remember thy congre-

gation, which thou purchased of old, which thou hast redeemed to be the tribe of thine inheritance" (74, 2), is no unworthy preparation for an understanding of S. Paul's teaching concerning "the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20, 28). This same two-fold conception of a particular and visible congregation on the one hand, and of an invisible and spiritual congregation on the other, is found in our own use of the word "Church," no less than in the Hebrew Psalter, and has justified scholars in speaking of the community of Israel as "The Jewish Church."

As to the second clause, "*The Communion of Saints*," the word "Saint" (*e.g.*, 16, 3; 85, 8; 149, 5) bears much the same meaning in the Psalter that it does in the New Testament, and in neither does it carry our modern use of it as equivalent to "the exceptionally good." It has been suggestively said that the best definition of the Bible meaning is given in the 50th Psalm (v. 5): "Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice"—those, in fact, who have answered to God's gracious call to enter into relation with him, and who seek to give back in thankfulness and service something of all the loving-kindness so freely poured out upon themselves. And "*the communion of Saints*" could not be a doctrine difficult of comprehension to a people who had been trained to find so active a delight in the fellowship of those bound to one another by a common love of God. "I am a companion of all them that fear thee" (119, 63), says one Psalmist. "As for the saints that are in the earth," cries another, "they are the excellent in whom is all my delight" (16, 3); but the joys of such communion were, for the most part, bounded by the limits of "the earth."

"A Communion of Saints," "a holy Church"—such ideals as these were not altogether outside the range of those

who wrote or of those who read the Hebrew Psalms, but in how far could they dream of their "Congregation of Saints" as becoming a "Catholic Church"—a Church intended "for the whole world"? Undoubtedly they could think of such a consummation as reached in one only way, through the gateway of their own ancient Law; but none the less some such vision filled the imagination of their poets. It is true that in so early an ode of victory as the 18th Psalm we have grim pictures of the conquered peoples, creeping out of their fastnesses, trembling and cringing, and offering to the mighty God-appointed "head of the nations" a "feigned obedience" (18, 43-45; cp. 2 Sam. 22, 42-46), and echoes of this old Davidic song of triumph still sound on in some Psalms of a later date (66, 3; 81, 15).

But in other of the Psalms there is a gentler and a very different note, such as the great hope—dare we call it a prophecy?—expressed in the 22nd Psalm: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord" (22, 27).

And as the centuries roll on the ideals become freer and more generous. "The princes of the peoples are gathered together to be the people of the God of Abraham," says one of the Temple songs (47, 9), but a still more glorious conception of "the city of God" is found in another of these Temple songs (87). Here we have a vision of free and joyous citizens drawn from all nationalities, each one seeking to claim Zion as his birthplace. The full significance of this Psalm is unhappily much obscured in our Prayer-Book version, and we shall not appreciate its full splendour until we realize that the great promises here made to alien nations and hereditary foes are put into the mouth of God himself. It is God whose "foundation is in the holy mountains," and who "loveth the gates of Zion"; and it is this same God who reckons up "Egypt and Babylon" as among those who know him, and who greets Philistia and Ethiopia

as though they were native-born (vv. 2, 4). "The Most High himself," as he counts over the register of names, welcomes each fresh nationality that passes up through the gates, presenting its claim to be admitted as a citizen of the beloved and unshakable City. Nay, more than this; he gives far beyond what has been asked, making no distinction between the strangers and the native-born, but declaring, "And Zion I will name: Mother. Everyone was born in her" (87, 5).¹ As we study this Psalm, with its unforgettable refrain: "This one was born there"; "This one and that one was born in her" (vv. 4, 5, 6), we feel that to men familiar with Divine promises of a good so large, so universal, it cannot have been difficult to learn to conceive of the "Congregation of the Saints" as being not *Holy* alone, but *Catholic*.

Dost thou believe in the remission of sins? This is another of those questions which our Jewish catechumen will answer without hesitation. It is true, indeed, that the Psalms cannot have made clear to him the one perfect medium through which the Divine forgiveness flows out to man. They have not spoken openly of "the Beloved," through whose redeeming blood "the forgiveness of our trespasses" has been made possible (Eph. 1, 6, 7), yet the Psalmists have taught no less plainly than the Apostles the sinfulness of sin, and the certainty that man's only hope of cleansing and restoration lies in God's free grace.² Every step along the painful road of sin and self-accusation can be traced in the Psalms. There is the haunting remembrance of the offences of early days (25, 7); the heavy burden of the *hidden* wrong-doing (32, 3, 4), and of the wilful continuance therein that cuts off the comfort of prayer (66, 18). Then follows the resolution to make confession (*e.g.*, 32, 5;

¹ Briggs's translation. See also Kirkpatrick.

² See in Rom. 4, 6-8, S. Paul's use of Ps. 32, 1, 2.

38, 18; 51, 3), and the abiding memory of the fulness of forgiveness that met that confession—not so much as imputing the guilt of it any more unto the transgressor (32, 5, 1, 2).

Naturally enough, the Psalmists speak in the terms of the religious ritual of their time. They desire to be purged with the bitter-sweet herbs (51, 7; 65, 3); they vow to make the sacrifices and burnt-offerings of the Temple services (*e.g.*, 50, 5; 51, 19); yet each one of these Psalms of penitence makes it abundantly clear that the writers are perfectly aware that it is only the spiritual washing and purging that can avail the transgressor, and that the duly ordained external sacrifices are less than nothing in God's sight, apart from those higher sacrifices of the broken and contrite heart (51, 17), or apart from a spirit "made new" (51, 10), just in order that it may answer to God's call and dedicate itself to the joyous task of doing the holy Will (40, 6, 8).

Nor do the Psalmists ever lose sight of the *wonder* of forgiveness—its patience (25, 6, 7), its plenteousness (130, 7), its completeness (*e.g.*, 32, 2, 5; 51, 1, 2, 7–9; 103, 3, 8–12), and the contemplation of such fulness of mercy brings to them awe as well as gladness. The more we ponder the Psalms, the more we come to feel that their teaching concerning "the remission of sins" lies very close indeed to the teaching of the New Testament, and it has been truly said that "Such a cry of the soul as the 51st Psalm, uttered hundreds of years before the Saviour came on earth, is surely a proof that much of the distinctive work of the Spirit in uplifting and renewing has been the heritage of God's servants in every age."¹

The resurrection of the flesh. Our catechumen has already confessed his belief in the Resurrection of the Messiah; now he is interrogated as to his belief in the Resur-

¹ Dr. Montagu Butler, *Sermons in Trinity Chapel*.

rection-life for himself and for his fellow-men. How far will the Psalms help him here? The answer to this question remains a matter of much dispute, but all authorities are agreed that the principal Psalms in which the answer must be sought are the 16th and 17th, the 49th and the 73rd. The 73rd Psalm shows us the trusting soul committing itself continually to the guidance of God, upheld and guided by him, and *afterward* "received with glory" (73, 23-26). What is the meaning of this "afterward," and are we to understand it as implying the unbroken carrying on in heaven of the blessed intercourse begun on earth? So some have interpreted it, and have seen in this assured happiness *after death* the Psalmist's explanation of all the injustices that perplex him in this life. Or turn to the famous verse with which another Psalm closes (17, 15): "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." So constantly are these words applied in the full Christian sense that it is difficult for us to remember that only a few lines earlier (vv. 9-14) the Psalmist has been praying, not for a clearer sight of God in the world beyond the grave, but for deliverance from bodily harm and possible death. We, from our different standpoint, are reading into his words the thought of the first "awakening" *after death*, and in so doing we are in danger of missing the lesson of his absorption in the thought of the blessedness of fellowship with God in this present life.¹

When we try to look back into the Psalms with the eyes of those who wrote them, it is well to remind ourselves that the Psalmists' comparative silence as to the Future State arose, as it was said by a writer of the last century,² not from *want* of religion, but from *excess* of religion. The Future Life was not denied or contradicted, but it was

¹ See Kirkpatrick on Ps. 17.

² Stanley's *Jewish Church*.

overlooked—"overshadowed by the consciousness of the actual presence of God himself."

We have already seen, in speaking of Hades (p. 160), that the Jews' primary conception of the other world was of a place where intercourse with God was cut short. There was nothing in the earlier beliefs of Israel that could lead any man—save the most pitiful and despairing sufferer—to greet Death with S. Paul's word of welcome, "Very much better." To them the phrase "land of the living" (116, 9) meant, as we have seen already (p. 7), just the familiar world of men, the land where God's praise could yet be sung, and not that shadowy realm, under the dominion of Death (49, 14), where his Name could no longer be celebrated (6, 5; cp. Isa. 38, 18-20).

But we know well that in the interval between the Old Testament Scriptures and the New "a revolution had happened in the minds of men, surely the greatest that the human mind had ever experienced. Man had in the interval come to consider or to suspect himself immortal."¹

Such a "revolution" as this, however, only comes about gradually. In a primitive and tranquil community, where Death is most commonly seen as the natural close of a long and even life, or where it comes as the climax of prolonged days, full of riches and honour (1 Chron. 29, 28), the *need* for a future life is not strongly felt. It is when the inequalities and wrongs and incompleteness of this world are pressing hardly, when lives full of promise and vigour are cut off in the midst of their days (102, 24), that questions arise in men's minds—questions that go straight to the root of their faith in God. If they believe that God governs and judges in righteousness "the world and they that dwell therein" (96, 13; 98, 9; 24, 1), and that his righteousness is an eternal righteousness (22, 3), then they must also

¹ Seeley's *Ecce Homo*.

believe that his righteousness shall triumph, even over Death and Sin and Time¹—if not on this earth, then in some such “new heaven and new earth” as the Prophets dimly foreshadowed (cp. Isa. 65, 17; 66, 22). So great an extension of men’s hopes could only come by slow degrees, as the unspoken thoughts of many minds found shape in the imperfect utterances of poet and prophet, who through their half-understood words, “builded better than they knew,” and thus laid the foundation for the completer belief “touching the hope and resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23, 6) that was to be revealed in Christ.

And in this laying of the foundations the Psalmists bore their slender part. “God will redeem my soul from the hand of Sheol, for he shall receive me,” is the faith that lights up the sombre majesty of the 49th Psalm (v. 15 marg.), that Psalm which beyond all the rest forces us to come face to face with inevitable Death. Yet again, there is the softer, more clinging note of the 16th Psalm: “Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see the pit” (16, 10). To us now that verse is for ever associated with the risen Christ, but in its original purpose it was intended to bring to men like ourselves the assurance that the God who has never in the earthly life failed them that seek him (9, 10) will not fail them now when the grave is opening before them. As to the way and the time of that deliverance the Psalmists have little to tell. The writer of the 73rd Psalm is content to trust his failing flesh and heart to the God whom he knows to be for ever his strength and his portion, without whose Presence neither earth nor heaven could satisfy (73, 24–26); but the writer of the 16th Psalm seems to go a step beyond the rest, for he declares, “My flesh shall dwell in safety” (v. 9)—a phrase of stronger confidence than our Prayer-

¹ Milton.

Book rendering "in hope," and he looks forward—beyond all the darkness of Sheol—to a life of unbroken gladness in the presence of God.

We must not lay undue stress on this Psalmist's distinctions between "flesh" and "heart" (v. 9), or expect to find in the Psalms in general the New Testament distinctions between "body and soul," "flesh and spirit," which have become so natural to ourselves. The Prophets and Psalmists in so far as they conceived of man as living after death, thought of him as a whole, "a person," such as he had been seen and known in life (cp. Isa. 14, 9-11), and probably the phrase of our Nicene Creed, "I look for the resurrection of the *dead*," would have been better understood by even the latest of the Psalmists than either of the alternative expressions made use of in our Creeds—"resurrection of the *flesh*," or "resurrection of the *body*."

Dost thou believe in everlasting life after death? So at last we come to the final question in the long series, and our catechumen is asked to declare his faith in "the life everlasting," or "the life of the world to come," as we have it expressed in our other forms of the Creed.

Is there anything in the Psalms answering to this thought that may be set against the mournful conceptions of Sheol in such Psalms as the 6th, 49th, and 88th (pp. 160, 176)? We dare not lay stress on words like these: "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him; even length of days for ever and ever" (21, 4); or on that still more comforting verse (21, 6), "Thou makest him most blessed for ever: thou makest him glad with joy in thy presence." Their spiritual application is easily seen, but their original meaning does not seem to extend beyond the idea of a long and prosperous reign, granted by God's favour to the king, on whom blessings both spiritual and temporal have been invoked in the preceding Psalm. But in the 16th Psalm, to

which such constant reference has been made, the aspirations are on a very high spiritual level, and "the path of life" which the Psalmist desires to be shown leads on to an abiding resting-place by God's right hand (16, 11).

If our hearts are seeking for words in which to express the sense of full and satisfying communion with God, we shall find them in abundance in the Hebrew Psalms. There can be no dispute at all as to this. The real point of difference among scholars is whether the Psalmists' conceptions reached out to a world on the far side of Death, or whether they were "satisfied" by such visions of the Divine glory and power and loving-kindness as were vouchsafed, even in this earthly life, to thirsting souls worshipping in God's sanctuary (63, 1-4).

It is wellnigh impossible for us, who come to these Psalms with almost twenty centuries of Christian interpretation behind us, not to find in them our own "sure and certain hope" of "everlasting life after death." But there is a deep interest in learning that the Jew of to-day, who cannot think, as we do, of life and immortality as brought to light through the Gospel of our Saviour Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1, 10 A.V.), nevertheless makes use in his burial and mourning services of each one of the four Psalms that we have been especially considering (16, 17, 49, 73) to declare and sustain his faith in a life beyond the grave, vouchsafed by his merciful God to each "loving one."¹

Summary.—To review, then, what we have been able to trace of the Christian Creed in the Jewish Psalter. We have found that our Jewish candidate for Baptism has been taught through the Psalms, through this "Book of Prayers and Praises" of his own Church, a clear faith in *God Almighty*, the *Father* and *Creator*; and that he has been in some measure prepared for a Messiah, "a *Christ*," who

¹ Authorized Hebrew Prayer-Book.

should be a *son of God*, and yet should *suffer*. We find, too, that the work—though not the Person—of the *Holy Spirit* of God had been richly revealed to him.

Moreover, it is clear that through the Psalms he had been taught to live in expectation of God's *coming to Judgment*, and had also learned to value the *fellowship of the saints*, of those who were bound one to another by the response of their lives to the loving-kindness of God, and who looked forward together to a glorious age when the *whole world* should be enrolled as citizens of God's own city, sharers in his *holy assembly*. Finally, we have seen that he had found in the Psalms the record of a deep and bitter experience of human *sin*, but likewise the record of a no less deep experience of God's free and gracious *forgiveness of sins*; and that more and more he had come to behold through hope, however dimly and imperfectly, a *life with God for ever more*—a life of gladness that should complete the fulness of his living joy.

Much, then, of the Christian Creed had been plain from the outset to our true Israelite; but how much more lay dark and meaningless until he had found the key to the whole in the Incarnation, and Death, and Resurrection of that "*Jesus of Nazareth*" whom now, on the day of his enrolment in Christ's own Church, he was no longer ashamed to confess as *Anointed Son* of the Almighty Father, and his own honoured *Lord* and *Saviour*.

CHAPTER XII

OLD THINGS BECOME NEW

(Conclusion)

WE English readers of the Psalter suffer a real loss in not knowing the collection as a whole under its twofold Hebrew designation, "The Book of Prayers and Praises."¹ To appreciate the full aptness of the description, we have only to recall the part played by the Psalms in our own Church services, both general and occasional. On fast-days and on feast-days, alike at marriages and at burials, in our sick-rooms as in our daily common worship, we make use of specially chosen Psalms to express for us our feelings of need or of thankfulness. Thirteen such selected Psalms are printed in full in our Prayer-Books, without reckoning those thirty-eight "Proper Psalms on certain days" whose use is indicated in the calendar, or the curious Psalm-mosaic found among the thanksgivings for mercies vouchsafed in the "Forms of Prayer to be used at Sea."

But specially selected Psalms are liable to change under successive Prayer-Book revisions. Far more intimately associated with our worship are those scattered phrases from the Psalms that are so interwoven with our Prayers as to have become an integral part of them. Such, for instance, are the great words from the 51st and the 143rd Psalms,

¹ With the same sort of alliteration as in our English equivalent: *Tephilloth* (Prayers) and *Tephillim* (Praises). For "Prayers" see the titles of Pss. 17, 86, 90, 102, and 142. For "Praises" see Ps. 145 and the whole class of "Hallelujah" Psalms.

placed among the preparatory sentences at Morning Prayer, to attune our minds to the confession of sin and the cry for mercy that follows. Such, again, are the versicles in Matins and Litany, that stir us to seek pardon for ourselves, protection for King and nation, righteousness and joy for priest and people. Or turn to the *Te Deum*, where yet another "mosaic" of *Prayers*, drawn from four different Psalms, supplies six out of the eight closing verses of that noble Hymn of Praise. This is best seen in the Prayer-Book Version (28, 10; 145, 2; 123, 3; 22, 5), where passages from the four Psalms indicated bring to a close, in humble yet confident *Prayer*, that noble Hymn of Praise. Or, once more, recall the cry for refuge and help, with its strong grasp upon the *Name* of the mighty Helper, that meets us (in slightly varied form) at Confirmation, in the Marriage Service, in the Visitation for the Sick—in the glad hour of thanksgiving as in the hour of penitence—in all times and circumstances pointing us to "the strong tower," assuring our hearts of a never-failing guidance and benediction from on high.

And as to our private use of the Psalter, we need no one to tell us how readily in sorrow and in joy, in confession and supplication and in thanksgiving, our thoughts clothe themselves in words borrowed from the Psalmists of Israel—and yet our very own. We have long ago discovered that the Psalms are a little *Prayer-Book* in themselves, as well as a *Hymn-Book*, but there is help of yet a third kind for which we turn to them. The element of what we may call *Preaching* is, in many of the Psalms, not less marked than in the writings of the Prophets. These Psalms speak home to our innermost conscience. They warn us when we are tempted to put our trust in the good things of this world (*e.g.*, 49, 6–10; 62, 10); they reprove us when we make low ideals of God, content to think of him as altogether such a one as

ourselves (50, 21). They rebuke those who say in deliberate wickedness: "God hath forgotten . . . he will never see it" (10, 11); but no less have they their word of admonition for those who cry out in faithless despondency: "I said in my alarm, I am cut off from before thine eyes" (31, 22).

Very specially may we apply to the Book of Psalms what Coleridge says of the Bible as a whole: "Need I say that I have found words for my inmost thoughts, songs for my joy, utterances for my hidden griefs, and pleadings for my shame and feebleness. . . . In short, the words of the Bible *find* me at greater depths of my being than all other books put together, and whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit."¹

The inexhaustible freshness of the Psalms is, indeed, no new discovery. The Saints in all ages have borne their witness to this wondrous fact, and yet to each one who makes it for himself, through his own personal experience, it comes as a new discovery. And in our generation many are newly proving it for themselves, by strangely differing methods.

The literary critic and the historian are continually proving it through the new light that falls upon their Biblical studies. The archæologist digs up records and relics of buried empires that help to date a particular Psalm, or that bring before our eyes some instrument of music once in use in the Temple services. The philologist, by his researches into Arabic or some other non-Biblical tongue, may come to a closer understanding than heretofore of the precise meaning of some rare word in the sacred "Songs of Zion." For the scholar "the old things" of the Psalter are for ever "becoming new."

Yet again—and this time with a very painful significance—certain of the Psalms "become new" to our

¹ See two separate passages in *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*.

missionary workers in Africa and China and India. As with still unaccustomed eyes the new-comers watch some grand heathen procession, and see the bystanders prostrating themselves as the image is carried past, there flashes into their memories a verse so often repeated mechanically: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands" (115, 4); and as they think of the debasing worship carried on within these temples, a new and mournful meaning falls upon the closing words of the passage: "They that make them shall be like unto them; yea, every one that trusteth in them" (v. 8). But over against this new sadness lent to the old words, there are other Psalms whose great promises now stand out increasingly in new and joyous relief. There are those reiterated promises now already, day by day, finding at least a partial fulfilment—that all the nations whom God has made shall come and worship him (66, 4; 86, 9). Then there is the declaration that "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord" (22, 27), that all alike shall share in the bountiful blessing of God, "even our own God" (67, 6); and there is the Divinely spoken pledge that even hereditary enemies shall be counted among the fellow-citizens of the one city of God (87, 4; see pp. 172, 173).

Or if we turn our eyes in a very different direction we shall see that by reason of our four years of war the Psalms have "become new" to thousands of our fellow-countrymen, and more particularly so to the soldiers who have been called to serve in Eastern lands. Names and places that were to them formerly names only—names associated, indeed, with holy things, yet having no actuality of their own—have become for many of this generation living and abiding realities. To not a few of our returned soldiers the words of the 48th Psalm, "As we have heard, so have we seen, in the city of the Lord of hosts" (v. 8), are a literal statement of fact,

like that other verse which has sounded with a thrill in the hearts of many of them: "Our feet are standing¹ within thy gates, O Jerusalem" (122, 2). These men have climbed "the holy hill" (15, 1); they have traversed Jordan; they have known the longing that is begotten of "a dry and weary land, where no water is" (63, 1). Egypt, Babylon, Sinai, the Red Sea—all these sacred names, and others besides, will hold for many of our sailors and soldiers undying associations. They know now by their own experience the natural setting of the Psalms, and as in years to come they look back upon the Eastern pictures printed indelibly upon their minds, many a verse of the Sunday Psalms will spring into new life and meaning.

But to come to things more directly spiritual—to the way in which, in these years of war, the Psalms have brought to many a new and living message, speaking direct to the hearts and needs of those who have been in the fiercest of the fight. Of such holy secrets it is not given us to know much or to speak much, but it is very certain that this War has furnished abundant additional material for such books as *The Psalms at Work*, or *The Psalms in Human Life*.

One such additional illustration,² which concerns a handful of young soldiers of the Yorkshire Regiment, may perhaps find place here. It belongs to the early days of 1915, when the poison gas was a new and little-understood peril added to all the other horrors of war, and these were untried soldiers of "the New Army." For five days they had been without rest, and now they found themselves cut off and surrounded by the enemy. Their captain had fallen, and they were under the command of a schoolmaster lieutenant. "They had no thought of surrender," but for the time being there was nothing more that they could do; so "in the few

¹ Or, as in margin, "have stood."

² See letter in *Yorkshire Post*, May, 1915.

moments of breathing-time before the expected onslaught " they read together the 91st Psalm, with its glorious promises of heavenly protection from all the manifold encompassing perils. And now the expected assault seemed at hand. Shells began to come over, and only gradually did it dawn upon the waiting soldiers that these were the protecting shells from their own British guns, opening for them a way of escape. For this little company the words of the ancient Psalm had found a literal fulfilment

But possibly some reader may be thinking, *And what of ourselves?* What of us who are neither scholars nor missionaries nor soldiers, but just everyday stay-at-home people, in whose daily lives the Psalms have always played so accustomed and so large a part? For us is there only the great blessing of a loving familiarity with each individual Psalm? Or is it true that for us also "the old things are become new"?

If indeed it be so, if we are inwardly conscious that some such transformation has taken place, this change will not have come without a measure of cost and effort on our own part. We can never enter rightly upon our rich heritage of all the spiritual wealth that is laid up for us in the Psalter until we have faced the truth that this treasure of God-inspired thoughts is contained —if we may adapt S. Paul's metaphor—"in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4, 7), and that it bears the impress of human passions and human ignorance. We cannot, we must not, blind ourselves to the fact that in this beloved Hymn-Book of the Church "there is a lower and a higher."

If, then, to us also the "old things" of the Psalms are to "become new," we must needs study them with the best of our God-given faculties, with the best helps at our command, and, above all, with the prayerful desire to be taught of God. Our judgments will often be mistaken, and some

of them will, to the very last, need to be revised and corrected and deepened; but in a most true sense, and within certain limits, it is the duty as well as the aim of every humblest lover of the Psalms to "discern, compare, pronounce at last." It was not the mere *reading*, it was the whole-hearted *seeking*,¹ the constant Godward cry for "understanding,"² that enabled the writer of the 119th Psalm to look forward hopefully even through his sore perplexities, and to say: "I will give thanks unto thee with uprightness of heart, when I learn thy righteous judgments."³ Is he not hereby teaching all those who in "uprightness of heart" seek for "understanding" that it is *God's* judgment, and not their own poor human judgment, alone and unaided, that they are bringing to bear upon the study of his life-giving word? If it be thus with any humblest student of the Psalms, truly to such an one "the old things are become new." And if once this stage has been—not *reached*, perhaps, but even seen afar off, then the questionings that may yet be caused by the present unsettlement of literary and historical criticism will assume their rightful proportions. We may shrink from them, or we may welcome them; we may consider them hasty or well-established, but in neither case will they touch anything of that which is most vitally precious to us in the Psalms. "The foundations" will *not* "be destroyed" (11, 3), but will be found to stand sure; firmer than before they were tried, just because they are not man's weak foundations, but "the firm foundation of God," (cp. 2 Tim. 2, 19).

For instance, we have seen (Chap. VI.) that David's direct part in the Psalter is now much minimized. We are warned that we cannot prove to demonstration his authorship of any single Psalm in the whole collection; while, on the other hand, we are convinced by irrefutable

¹ 119, 10.² 119, 27, 34, 104, 125, 130, 144.³ 119, 7.

evidence that the 150 poems that make up our great Hymn-Book are a gift to the Church, not from any one famous poet, but from many unknown Hebrew poets, separated one from another, in time and place and circumstances, yet each one of them filled with a fervent love to God and to his own nation, each one making his separate contribution to the needs of his own day—and to the needs of our day also.

Reluctantly, perhaps, we have some of us reached this so-called “new” standpoint—less *new*, in fact, than many of us suppose—and grudgingly, perhaps, we have admitted that it has brought us gain as well as loss. A little later, and we may have come to feel that the loss is smaller and the gain much greater than we supposed.

For instance, we find that though David’s direct part in the Psalter can never be defined within exact limits, still less can his indirect part be so limited. It is something too subtle and too far-reaching for that. The enduring influence upon Hebrew music and poetry of David’s traditional skill is not easily to be exaggerated, but even stronger than this was the impress of his whole-hearted desire that all that was best and noblest in man’s powers and possessions should be consecrated to the service of God. And thus it befell that “David the King” set up a standard of the glory of worship, not for his own age or his own country alone, but for all time. So deeply enduring has been the influence of the David of history and tradition that three thousand years later we English church-goers cannot read either the Old Testament or the New, or the Apocryphal writings, neither can we take part in the daily services of our own Church, without becoming conscious how the figure of the sweet Psalmist of Israel dominates our Christian worship, still, as in the words of the quaint sixteenth-century hymn—

“Here David stands with harp in hand,
The Master of the Quire”—

uplifting and guiding the hearts of successive generations of worshippers to consecrate to God's service their best and rarest gifts.

But David's part in the Psalter is, after all, only a matter of secondary importance for us. A greater than *David* is here, and it behoves each one of us, as we saw in a former chapter (pp. 162-164), to ask ourselves exactly what we understand by such words as these of S. Peter's when explaining and applying the 16th Psalm: "David being therefore a prophet . . . foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption" (Acts 2, 29-31). Such an interpretation does not of itself satisfy the modern mind as completely as it satisfied S. Peter's hearers, and as it satisfied many after-generations of devout Bible-readers, and difficulties unperceived at earlier stages of thought began to make themselves felt, and to demand a new and larger answer. The impatient cry was raised that we were making "wizards" of the Hebrew prophets, instead of far-sighted "preachers of righteousness," and reverent minds were troubled. But once again with the new need there came new help, and gradually we awoke to find that we were in danger of impoverishing our whole conception of Prophecy, through our misunderstanding of the Divine methods of teaching. We began to see that God did not give to men of old time, any more than he gives to us, the power of foreseeing particular events centuries in advance, and yet that he is for ever teaching his faithful people to read the present in the light of the stored-up words and deeds of the past.

But does all this mean that we can no longer use such expressions as "Christ in the Psalter," or "The Witness of the Psalms to Christ"? Most assuredly not so. Let us remember that, though "Words can have but one meaning,

they may have a manifold application,"¹ and that the noblest ideals of the Psalms—for example, the perfect Servant (40, 6-8), the perfect King (89, 26, 27), the blameless Sufferer (22, 1, 2, 8), and the One whom death could not hold (16, 10), none of them found their true fulfilment until they found it in "this Jesus, both Lord and Christ," of S. Peter's Pentecostal sermon (Acts 2, 36). Do we wonder that the earliest preachers of the Gospel overleapt all thought of the primary meaning of the words, and saw in the Psalms only the things concerning their Master? The more intimate we become with the Psalms, the more we are conscious of their *forward* look, as though reaching out for a something beyond their own power to define. That great Bible-student, Chinese Gordon, writing of "the wonderful exactitude" of God's rule, says: "He does or overrules an event in B.C., and fits that very event into an action in A.D."² May we not in like manner say of the Psalms: "Every noble conception or aspiration found in these poems of B.C. has influenced men's thoughts and lives in A.D."? And here again we can thankfully say: "The old things are become new."

Centuries of experience have taught us what a common ground for Jew and Christian, learned and unlearned, old and young, is found in this ancient Hymn-Book. All can join in the same words, and yet the individual messages brought by the words vary infinitely in range, and to no two minds do the Psalms bring exactly the same message. It might be possible to arrive at a consensus of the ten or twelve Psalms that have been most universally loved, but most of us have in our mental storehouse a sort of illuminated Psalter in which particular verses shine out for ourselves, though for reasons that no other could even guess at. And,

¹ W. T. Davison in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Psalms."

² "Letters,"

happily for us, such fresh associations are for ever being freshly woven round the ancient words, and verses lying dormant in the memory may at any moment spring unexpectedly into life to meet some fresh experience, causing us to cry once more, "Behold the old things are become new." And as we thus look with newly opened eyes upon the well-known words, we shall enter in some measure into the depths of Bacon's noble sentence:

"Divine prophecies, being of the nature of their Author, with whom a thousand years are but as one day, are therefore not fulfilled punctually at once, but have springing and germinant accomplishment throughout many ages."¹

Well may we thank God for the ever "springing and germinant words" that are his rich gift to us in this *Book of Prayers and Praises*, this precious and inexhaustible "Hymn-Book of the Church," that was once the guide and the joy of those who went before us on the road of life, as now it is of ourselves, and as it will surely be of those who come after us!

¹ *Advancement of Learning*, Bk. II., iii. 2.

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